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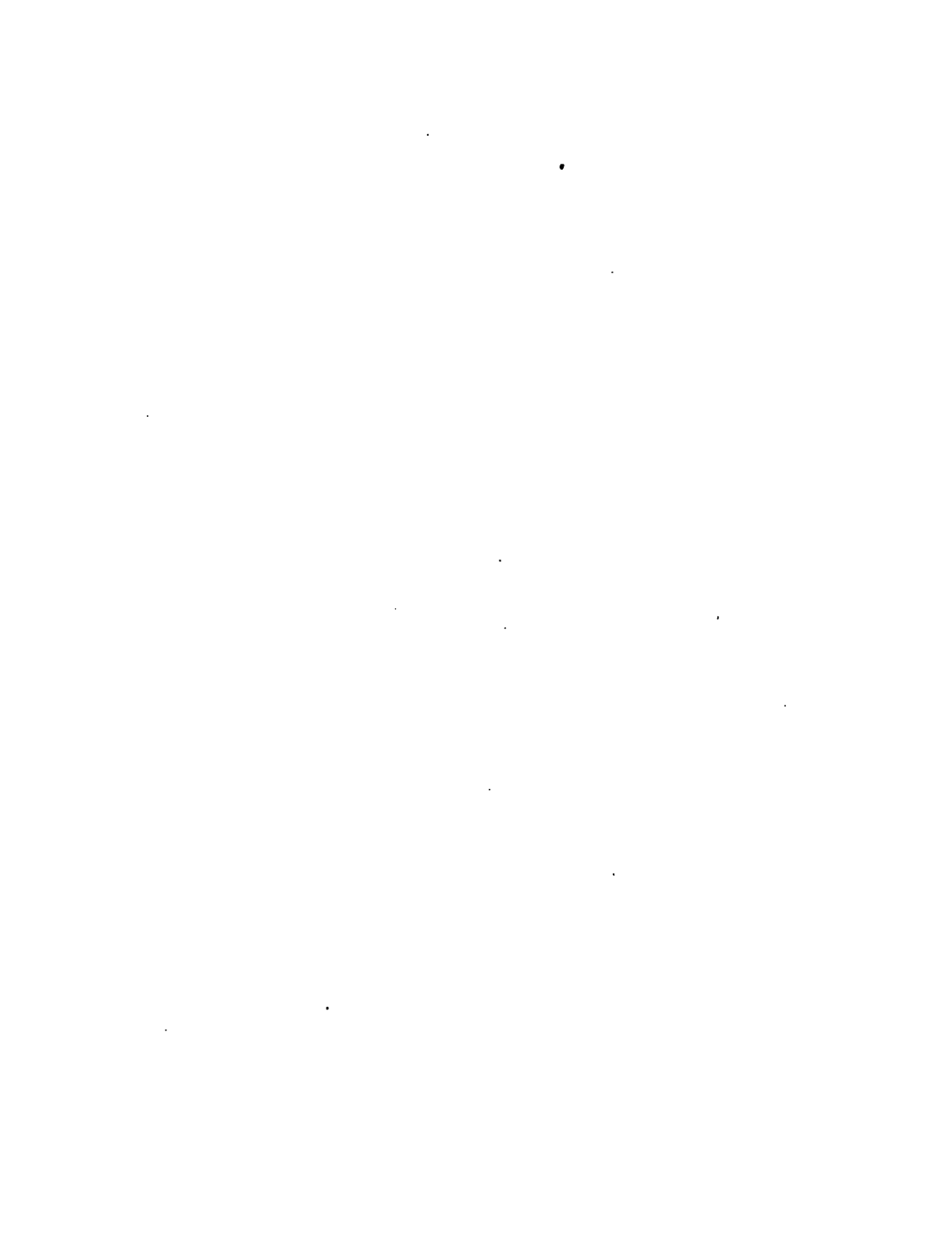
PAUPERITAS

FRANCISCAN
MISSIONS

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AMONG
THE COLLIERS
AND IRONWORKERS
OF MONMOUTHSHIRE

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Colliers and Ironworkers of Monmouthshire.

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"To the poor the Gospel is preached."—ST. LUKE vii. 22.



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TO HIS EMINENCE

HENRY EDWARD,

Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster,

*Whose heart, like that of St. Francis, overflows with zeal
for the salvation of souls, and love of the poor
of Jesus Christ,*

*this record of Franciscan labours in a remote district of
his Province is, with his kind permission, very
respectfully dedicated.*

Christmas, 1875.

PREFACE.

FROM time to time, as incidents relating to these missions have been described to friends, some of whom were interested in the work itself, and others in those who are concerned in it, it has been said, "Why do you not publish an account of the missions from the beginning? It would be as interesting as the annals of the Propagation of the Faith, and more so, because, nearer home." Now and again, during the last fifteen years, events have been noted down as they occurred, and, when the pressure of work permitted, or a pause in it has been rendered necessary by illness, a few pages have been written; and at last the time has come when those whose counsels have never been disobeyed

impose upon me the task of putting the materials together, to form some record of the works of the Capuchin Fathers in this remote district, which, it is hoped, may interest others, as well as those dear friends who are sure to judge kindly of all that relates to it. The writer of these pages deems it the greatest earthly privilege to have been in any degree connected with such a work, and by this means to have realised even in the glare and glitter of the nineteenth century those ages of faith when St. Francis went forth from his father's house, to outward seeming an outcast and a beggar, but to the eyes of Angels clad in the glory of those first Apostles, who set out to conquer the world for God, "*nihil habentes, sed omnia possidentes.*"

FRANCISCAN MISSIONS

AMONG THE

Colliers and Ironworkers of Monmouthshire.

CHAPTER I.

THE WORK BEGUN.

“When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, did you want anything? But they said, Nothing.”—*S. LUKE xxii. 35.*

IN May, 1860, at the request of the Bishop of Newport and Menevia, the Superior of the Capuchin Monastery at Pantasaph, in North Wales, sent one of his fathers to take charge of the Mission of Pontypool, in Monmouthshire. Poor as St. Francis, or as those first Evangelists whom St. Francis desired his sons to imitate, he went forth without purse or scrip to begin his work. As railway companies, however, do not appreciate the virtue of poverty, he was obliged to borrow money for his journey, and so his mission was begun, not only in absolute poverty, but with a small debt.

The good father found his new flock even poorer than he had anticipated, and their poverty in temporal matters exceeded by their ignorance and destitution in things spiritual.

Scattered in groups here and there over the hills, and huddled together in the meanest and dirtiest corners of a mean and dirty-looking town, the Irish were everywhere regarded as the offscouring of the people—the most degraded where all were low enough—the most drunken of the drunkards—the filthiest where all were dirty. They were employed in the hardest and worst-paid work, and subjected to every species of annoyance and insult on account of their faith—dim and flickering as its light had become in their poor worn-out hearts; and Irish-like they acted up thoroughly to the character imputed to them.

In the whole district given into the charge of the fathers, comprising at that time about twelve square miles, there was no Catholic church or chapel save the one small church at Pontypool;* no school; no appliances of any kind for working a mission, even on the smallest scale, still less for doing what Father Elzear had also been sent to do—establishing a community.

The one secular priest formerly in charge of the mission had resigned his post because he found it impos-

* This church was built during the time that Mr. Woollett, the first resident priest at Pontypool, had charge of the mission, the bishop of the diocese contributing largely towards the cost of the erection. Mr. Woollett, after a few years' indefatigable labour in endeavouring to minister, single-handed, to the spiritual needs of this large district, was compelled on account of his broken health to resign his charge. He never fully recovered the health and strength he had so overtaxed in his missionary duties among the Monmouthshire hills, though he lived some years afterwards. He has now gone to receive the reward of his devoted labours.

sible to subsist on the scanty alms of the people, to say nothing of supporting a school, or providing things needful for carrying on any permanent work. Most men would have despaired at such a prospect; Father Elzear, on the contrary, concluded it was just the place for Franciscans, and, with the zeal and simplicity of a Franciscan, set to work.

The first evening after his arrival in this inauspicious region, as he was beginning to think over his plans for the future, there arrived a deputation of Irishmen as spokesmen of the rest of the congregation, not for the purpose of welcoming their new pastor, but to say that, as they did not wish for a foreign priest, they should refuse to contribute anything to his support. Father Elzear listened calmly and patiently, and, when they allowed him to speak, informed them that he certainly had not inflicted himself upon them of his own free will; that he had been sent to them by their Bishop and by his superior, and that he should do his very best for their spiritual interests; and, if they would only wait patiently a little while, both he and they would, no doubt, soon come to understand each other better. In the course of half an hour, Franciscan meekness and humility so touched their Irish hearts that they went away with a promise and resolution to try and give double of what they had hitherto done! In the mean time Father Elzear set out, bag in hand, to beg

food for himself and the one lay brother who had accompanied him to Pontypool, and explained to the people, as he asked alms from house to house, the object of his coming amongst them, the absolute poverty enjoined by his rule, and the necessity of their contributing to the support of their pastor and providing as much as possible for the expenses of the church.

From that time to this neither he nor his community have ever wanted bread, though occasionally they have been reduced to the traditional half-loaf, nor has he himself, ever for a moment doubted that a fresh supply would come from some quarter or other before that last loaf was eaten.

On one occasion, not long after his establishment at Pontypool, it came to pass that there was scarcely sufficient food for the day, and only the sum of one half-penny remaining in the exchequer. Cheerful as ever, or rather, indeed, more joyful than usual, Father Elzear went about his work, which just then happened to be that of sweeping the church, when he was summoned to speak to a visitor. This visitor was a lady, thickly veiled, who, putting an envelope into his hand, said, "I was told to bring you this, but forbidden to say who sent it. Good morning." The envelope was found to contain a five-pound note.

After three months of incessant labour, toiling over the hills, searching out the scattered flock, and endea-

vouring to revive the flickering embers of their faith, and bring them to Mass and the Sacraments, Father Elzear determined that somehow or other he must have a school.

It was almost impossible to make any great impression on the grown-up people, who had been getting harder and colder and more indifferent from year to year; but there was hope for the children, who were swarming and burrowing about like wild rabbits, and something might thus be done to train up a new generation of Catholics. The difficulty was to find a teacher, seeing there was no apparent means of providing for one, but now Father Elzear's thoughts reverted to an incident that had occurred on his way to Pontypool. He had then, at the request of his superior, stopped for a few days at Oxford, where the priest was ill, in order to supply his place for Ascension Day and the following Sunday. Whilst there he met a lady who two years previously had been received into the Catholic Church, and had in consequence of that step been exposed to many bitter trials and privations, and who had for some time been anxious to devote herself to some special work for the glory of God and the good of souls, and had been praying earnestly for guidance. When she heard him relate the circumstances under which he had been sent to take charge of the Mission of Pontypool, and still more when the rule of St. Francis—with its absolute

poverty, its primitive simplicity, its unmitigated adoption of the evangelical counsels, and the supernatural imitation enjoined by it of the life of our Lord and His first disciples—was described to her, by one whose heart and soul were wholly devoted to its practice, it seemed as though the one thing desired and longed for was found, and she said, "Father, let me go and help you, and live like a Franciscan among your poor people."

As our Lord replied to some who wished to follow Him, "The foxes have their holes, and the birds of the air their nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head," so this good father tried to discourage his would-be disciple by the reply, "The mission is so poor, it would be difficult to find a decent lodging for you; but," he added, after a pause, "if it be the will of God, He will show us the way." So the matter was left, but, now that the school was absolutely needed, Father Elzear remembered the help thus proffered three months previously, and, after, having secured a lodging consisting of one small room in a tumble-down house near the church, which was the only accommodation he could find, he wrote and despatched the following letter:—

DEAR MISS —, I have found a lodging for you ; so will you come as soon as possible, as I have no one to teach the poor children? All the people here are

very poor, but our Lord was born poor, and lived poor, and died poor, and so here you can be like Him.

Wishing you every blessing,
I remain, yours truly in Christ,
F. E."

This summons was promptly obeyed, and Miss — wrote to say she would arrive at Pontypool the following Monday.

Father Elzear seems to have thought that his expected assistant was a very hungry person, for on the Sunday previous the following notice, amongst others, was given out from the altar:—"A respectable lady is coming from Oxford on Monday to teach our poor children, so the school will begin next week. You must now give us a double amount of food." The description of this lady's arrival at Pontypool, and the commencement of her work, written some time afterwards for a friend, will best convey an idea of the state of affairs at Pontypool at that time.

"On the 30th July I started by an early train from Oxford, leaving its 'domes and spires, gardens and groves,' bathed and glowing in the morning light; and in the course of some hours I was whirled far away from its atmosphere of refinement and repose, its learning, and its grand traditions, into the heart of the coal and iron district of Monmouthshire. My destination was Pontypool, a town tolerably well known now

as one of the centres of the iron trade, but in those days to ask at the Oxford Station for a ticket to Pontypool produced somewhat the same effect as to ask for one to Kamschatka. Towards evening, however, I reached this land, unknown, as it seemed, to civilised cities, and had my first view of Pontypool. At a little distance it looked picturesque enough, with houses and cottages flung here and there on the side of the hills, and clustering together in the valleys; but to traverse its streets was another matter; narrow, roughly and imperfectly paved, and filthy, the houses badly built and some in ruins, dwellings and inmates alike coated over with grime and grease—it looked like a slice from the worst slums of London (with London briskness eliminated), cut out and planted down there amongst the wild hills and valleys.

“After toiling up a steep and most unsavoury street, a purer atmosphere was reached at last; there, high above the smoke and clamour, stood the Catholic Church throned like a queen. How thankful I was to see the cross on its roof, and the glimmer of the sanctuary lamp from its windows!

“It is a plain substantial-looking structure without any attempt at ornamentation, but thoroughly well-proportioned, and good of its kind. The priest’s house—if house it could be called—consisted then of three small rooms adjoining the church, and there the good Ca-

puchin father, with one lay brother, had taken up his abode. It was like a glimpse of Italy, or a vision of mediæval times, to see the rough habit, cord, and sandals of St. Francis, and like a whole meditation in itself to see the simplicity and humility enshrined in the good father's countenance and bearing.

"Altogether—with the sudden plunge from Oxford to this antipodes of Pontypool, the straggling grimy town in the midst of the wild irregular hills, the unkempt barbarous-looking people, and then this oasis of rest in the church, where monks flitted about in habit and cowl, I felt as if dreaming an incongruous dream."

"My lodging was near the church, and consisted of one room, reached by a steep and rickety staircase, and my landlady was suspiciously red-nosed and watery-eyed. A strong smell of whisky pervaded the house, as, with great demonstrations of welcome, she led me up stairs and consigned me to my room, kindly declaring her intention of being a mother to me!

"How thankful I was to be shut in at last! and my joy was great to find that the window looked straight across to the sanctuary, and that I should always be able to see the glimmer of the lamp burning before the Most Holy. I was alone and friendless, cut off from my accustomed surroundings, an exile in a strange world; yet here was perfect rest, and the sweetness of home.

"The next day I set off in search of the Catholic children. The streets I had passed through in my way to the station were squalid and dirty, but the hopeless filth and wretchedness of the holes and corners I had to penetrate in my visit are quite beyond description, and my poor children were grubbing and grovelling among heaps of ashes and refuse, with greasy grimy hands and faces, their clothes in tatters, and their feet shoeless and stockingless. When I tried to make friends with them, some fled in terror, and others stood as if petrified with astonishment. The mothers ran out of the houses to stare at the strange apparition, and to see what evil designs might be brewing against their offspring; and, after an indiscriminate screeching and boxing of ears on the part of the parents, and howling on the part of the children, I was allowed a breathing-space to explain the phenomenon of my appearance amongst them. I told them I had come from a distance on purpose to teach their children, and that they must be so kind as to send them up to the church (which, in lack of other building, had to be used as a schoolroom), the next morning, with clean hands and faces. A stolid stare from some, a contemptuous grunt from others, a half-approving nod from the better disposed, seemed to be all the answer I was likely to get. Poor things! they had so long been looked upon as a sort of lepers or Pariahs—outcasts whom no civilised person would

approach except to give them in charge of the police—that their first thought at the sight of a stranger was one of defiance; but we soon knew each other better.

“Next morning the church door was opened wide at nine o’clock, and presently, howling, hooting, fighting, and tumbling one over the other, in rushed the hopeful Catholic youth of Pontypool.

“The sight of Father Elzear in his habit, looking like a rock of granite for the waves to break against, made them pause open-mouthed and wide-eyed. Under cover of the lull, and with some difficulty, the heterogeneous mass of humanity was arranged in rows and individualised, to its own great astonishment. Scarcely half-a-dozen children had ever seen a book, and, worse still, not more than three or four could make the sign of the cross, repeat the simplest prayer, or tell Who made them.

“To teach the first prayers and the simplest elements of religion, was the work of the first week; and, after a few days of discipline and teaching, my wild Arabs began to look more like civilised beings.

“In the course of a few weeks (so good was their natural disposition or, rather, so strong the grace of their baptisms), they became as orderly and manageable a set of children as I would wish to see; and, of all I have since then taught and trained, none have ever been so docile and affectionate, so open to good im-

pressions, or so dearly loved as my first Pontypool children. Most of those whose history I know up to this time have turned out well; many are now in America, and but few remain in this neighbourhood; but, wherever they may be, I still keep them fondly in remembrance, still pray for them in the church where they used to gather round me, and ever look forward to the time when I shall see their dear faces again where no one can grow old or change.

“I shall never forget my first class for confession, and those eager faces drinking in the unknown truths with wonder and awe. ‘We never know’d what sin was till you *come*, else us ’ad never ha’ been so bad,’ they would say; or one would look up and say, ‘I don’t tell so many lies now as I’d used to.’ One boy astonished me, after a lesson on the seventh commandment, by saying, in a defiant sort of tone, ‘Sure ’tis no sin to take a bit o’ coal.’ I took some trouble to convince him that, if the coal did not belong to him, and he had no permission to take it, certainly it was a sin to do so. He seemed only half to believe it. However, after making his first confession, he came straight up to me with a look of relief and said, ‘I *did* tell the priest about that ’ere coal.’

“The children’s greatest delight was to find new children and bring them to hear the instructions; and not children only, for, one evening after rosary, one of

my boys, who had gone to work a week before, came up the church followed by a dozen tall men with very black faces; whom he marshalled into the sacristy, where the evening instructions were given, and introduced them thus:—‘These ’ere chaps knows nought about sin, so I tell’d ’em a bit, and now you can learn ’em some more.’

“This was the beginning of my grown-up classes; most of the younger Irish people in the district, even up to twenty-five or thirty years of age, were as absolutely ignorant as the children had been. The original settlers who had come direct from Ireland had been taught in their childhood, but they only knew their prayers and catechism in Irish. Their children, born and grown up amidst Welsh and English people, did not know their parents’ original language, whilst they themselves did not know enough English to teach even the most elementary truths: all which, added to the indifference that had grown upon them through neglect or want of opportunity to attend to their religion, had produced this general state of ignorance.

“Now, however, when the opportunity was offered them, the young men and women came night after night to be taught the first principles of religion; and, as very few could read, prayers and catechism had to be instilled into them by constant repetition, and the explanation given in words to suit their very limited capacity.

It was quite touching to see tall strong young men, who could be violent and fierce enough upon occasion, standing up with joined hands and reverent faces to repeat prayers after me like little children.

"At this time there was neither church nor school-building in any part of the district under the fathers' care, though its extent was about twelve miles, excepting the small church at Pontypool, and that was only capable of holding about 200 people, not a tenth part of the number of Catholics belonging to the mission.

"The Irish families, and those who ought to have been Catholics, were scattered over the hills here and there in groups, among the English and Welsh population; and at Abersychan, two miles distant from Pontypool, about 1300 Irish people were clustered about the extensive ironworks in which they earned their bread. In those days, before the passing of the Factory Acts Extension Bill, both boys and girls were sent to work on the '*tips*'* almost as soon as they were old enough to walk there.

"Day and night, on alternate weeks, amid the smoke and sulphur, the black coal and iron, the din and

* The *tips* are the immense heaps of refuse from the coal pits or iron furnaces, where boys and girls are employed in clearing away the cinders or shale that are emptied or *tipped* out of the trams. At Abersychan the *tips* are almost as high as the neighbouring hills, and at night, when the red-hot liquid dross emptied from the waggons rolls down the steep mounds in streams of fire, it gives one a very good idea of a volcano in a state of eruption.

whirring of unwearied wheels, they toiled on, with tired limbs and drowsy eyes, until all human feeling seemed crushed and hammered out of them ; and they grew up callous and indifferent, their one idea of earthly happiness being to sleep whenever they could, to eat as much as they could get, and to get well drunk when they received their wages !

“ The fathers, however, went about over the hills and amid the cinder-tips in search of these stray sheep, and soon they were induced to come trooping down after their hard day's or night's work ; often through rain and storm they came, never seeming to heed the soaking they got, and thus by slow degrees their poor benumbed souls awoke to the thought of God, and of the beautiful toilless life that might one day be theirs when this life of labour was ended.

“ It was more difficult than it had been with the children to make them realise the idea of sin, and that it was something to be avoided. How could they, living and breathing, as they did, in an atmosphere of brutal immorality ? For, when the secrets of this world are disclosed, and its hidden places opened out, if there be pause enough for a thrill of horror amidst the universal catastrophe, it will surely quiver through many when the history of the forges and cinder-tips, the mines and miners, the masters and workmen, of these hills and valleys, is disclosed.

"Amongst the thousands of unbaptized, however, these poor Irish youths and girls had the grace of holy baptism in their souls—buried or deadened, it might be, but still there, and capable of shining forth when the clouds and darkness were penetrated. They had the gift of faith waiting to be used, and, though their intellects were so dulled that in many cases they scarcely seemed to have the intelligence of well-trained brutes, this hidden light enabled them to understand those things which God has hidden from the wise and prudent and has revealed unto little ones. It was wonderful how their faces changed and brightened when brought under the influence of the Sacraments. No doubt they fall again and again into their old habits; often it seems as if all were lost; but age, sickness, or the approach of death brings back the lessons they learnt, even if they do not earlier recover themselves; and, even if here and there one mortal sin less is committed, it is worth all the labour one can give."

CHAPTER II.

FEELINGS OF THE TOWNSPEOPLE TOWARDS THE MONKS.

"And the whole city was moved."—Acts xxi. 30.

BEFORE proceeding further with this narrative, we may turn aside to notice the extreme curiosity and

interest manifested by the inhabitants of Pontypool at the advent among them of a real live monk.

Every time Father Elzear went out, although in secular dress, and with nothing in his appearance to indicate his sacred office to a casual observer, not even the absence of beard or whisker (for St. Francis did not allow his sons what was in his day considered the vanity of shaving), he was surrounded by crowds of eager faces, and his progress through the street caused as much excitement as though he had been the Pope in person. Dark rumours were of course afloat about Jesuit plots and Papal intrigues against the peace and well-being of the town, which the inhabitants thought it hard to reconcile with the meek and gentle look and appearance of the monk when they caught sight of him walking quietly through the street. But the church and the priest's house, and, above all, the monk's habit, were suspected; and it was the favourite amusement of idle people to hover about and watch, with the hope of getting a glimpse of Father Elzear clad in his Franciscan dress. To the credit of the people, however, it must be said, that very seldom was a word of insult or ridicule heard from them.

The following conversation was overheard one day as Father Elzear was standing outside the garden wall, giving some directions to a workman. Two men coming from opposite directions met a short distance

from him, and simultaneously stopped to gaze at the apparition.

"I say, Bill, look at that 'ere old 'ooman," exclaimed one.

"'Tis no old 'ooman; 'tis an old man," was the rejoinder.

Neither was able to convince the other, when, at last, an Irishman appeared on the scene, and settled the dispute by calling them a couple of fools, and pronouncing, *ex cathedrâ*, "'Tis nayther a man nor a woman, for 'tis the *praste*!" With which prompt decision of the question they all walked away perfectly satisfied.

That the people of Pontypool quickly learnt to know and appreciate the good father whose coming there had at first excited suspicion, curiosity, and amusement, may be seen from the following extract from a local paper. It contains an account of the presentation to him of a testimonial, which was the spontaneous expression of the esteem in which, within only three years after his arrival, he began to be held.

A suit of clothes was certainly an unusual and primitive form for a testimonial to take, but the reason was that the good father, in his zeal for his mission, could not afford himself the luxury of new clothes, and sometimes appeared in extraordinary coats much too large

or wofully small, which some brother priest had out of compassion bestowed upon him. Moreover, his people knew well that, if they gave him anything that could by any possibility be put to any other use, for the school or the mission, it would not stay long in his possession.

CATHOLIC CONCERT AND TESTIMONIAL.

Had any proof been required that the spirit of religious intolerance was dying out, or, at all events, was becoming confined to a very narrow range in this district, such proof was afforded in our Town Hall on the evening of Wednesday last, on which occasion a presentation, accompanied by a concert of vocal and instrumental music, was made to Father Elzear, priest of the Roman Catholic Church, which, apparently, obtained the patronage and support of all the liberal and enlightened members of every religious denomination in this town.

This "mission," up to the present or to a very recent period, may be deemed a poor one, and the rev. gentleman on whom the charge was conferred, like many others of his class, had so far abnegated self, in promoting the secular as well as the religious welfare of his flock, as to become in want of what many people would deem the necessaries of life. Indeed, it is stated that Father Elzear has carried this kind and benevolent feeling so far beyond its legitimate boundary as to call forth the remonstrances of many of his friends, who doubtless supposed that the milk of his human kindness did not always flow in the best or most proper channels. It will be readily imagined, therefore, that the presentation consisted more of the useful than of the orna-

mental articles that are fashioned for the service of man, which will at once be apparent when it is stated that it comprised a valuable suit of clothes, and an elegant watch of superior workmanship. As already hinted, and as may be gleaned from what is subjoined, the subscription-list contained the names of many of the members of various religious bodies; and, after Father Caldwell, of Abergavenny, had been voted to the chair, and an address had been made by the Rev. Mr. Abbott, the presentation was proceeded with, the Chairman reading the following address:—

To the Rev. Father Elzear.

We have assembled here this evening for the purpose of presenting you with the accompanying testimonial of our affection and esteem, and in some measure to express our gratitude for your zealous and untiring efforts for our spiritual and temporal benefit. You have spared no labour, and left no means untried, to raise and improve this mission. It is to you we owe our present abundant means of spiritual and temporal improvement, our church open for constant services, our schools, and general means of instruction. You have done all you can to enable us to bring up our children as good Christians, and useful members of society, and to make the name of Catholic a glory, instead of (as it sometimes has been) a reproach amongst those around us. And, when we consider that all this has been done calmly and quietly, amidst difficulties that would have deterred most men, and a poverty that would have made them despair, we feel that we do indeed owe you a debt of gratitude which we can never discharge. We are not unmindful that, in the true spirit of self-sacrifice, whilst labouring for the good of others, you entirely forget yourself, and it is for this reason that we have ventured to offer our testimonial in a somewhat unusual form, in order that it may not be in your power, as on other occasions, to give up what you have received for yourself for the benefit of others. Some kind friends, not members of your flock, knowing our poverty and your worth, have lent us a helping hand, and have joined us in this expression of gratitude and esteem. That you may be spared many long years to watch over us with your fatherly care, to warn us when we go astray, to raise us when we fall, and guide us in the path of virtue; and that you may hereafter receive, in the presence of your flock, the crown of your labours in heaven, is the prayer of your faithful and affectionate children,—THE CATHOLICS OF PONTYPOOL.

The reading of this address, which we believe to be the composition of a humble member of Father Elzear's church, created much applause, and elicited from the rev. gentleman the following reply:—

My dear kind Friends,—I am indeed most grateful for your valuable present, and still more so from the kind manner in which you have presented it. I assure you that I was taken by surprise when I found that I was to be so honoured; and, although I have not done anything more than my duty in labouring for your spiritual and temporal benefit, for which I look for no reward here below, still it gratifies me and warms my heart to receive from you such tokens of your affection for me, and appreciation of my unworthy labours. May Almighty God bless my dear flock with His abundant grace, for without His blessing no labours will prove of any avail. But that you, my flock, and my own children in our Lord, for whom I have laboured in the face of so many difficulties, should thus testify your good feeling towards me, does not astonish me so much as it does to find that so many people not of our faith should have joined so nobly and generously to do me this great honour. I do, indeed, feel myself unworthy of so much kindness, and I do not know how to express my sense of their goodness. Ever since I came to Pontypool I have experienced the same kindness from all classes of people, rich and poor alike. [After enumerating his early difficulties in this town, and his success with the school, of which Mr. Morrell, the Government Inspector, had given a very favourable report, and the kindness he had experienced from several leading gentlemen in furtherance of the interests of religion and education, the rev. gentleman said—] I may instance this evening's entertainment, where the excellent performers of the brass band from Newport have generously and charitably given part of their day's work to assist us, which they can ill afford to do. Again, I repeat it, I have no words to express my feelings. I can only, therefore, beg you to believe that my sense of your kindness is deep indeed; and I pray Almighty God, in whose hands are all treasures, to pour down upon you His select blessings in return for your goodness to me.

Father Elzear, who was loudly cheered during his address, resumed his seat amid much applause.

CHAPTER III.

A SCHOOLMASTER ENGAGED — RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTIONS—A ROOM HIRED FOR MASS AT ABERSYCHAN.

“God gave the increase.”—1 Cor. iii. 6.

WITHIN the first year of Father Elzear's establishment at Pontypool, the work of religious instruction increased so much that it was found impossible to carry on both that and the school without more help ; for not only were there large classes every evening, but, as many young men worked at nights in alternate weeks, there were day classes for them. And, again, there were many older people who, since leaving Ireland in their youth, had never been to the Sacraments, and had forgotten all they once knew. Many of them were ashamed to come publicly with the rest, and so it was thought best to devote the whole day, during some months, to the work of giving instruction. Notice was accordingly given out in the church that those who wished to be taught separately could come at any hour of the day most convenient to themselves.

By this means many who had been living as heathens, and often for years in grievous sin, were brought to the Sacraments. This work was thought so important that Father Elzear, having succeeded in making his people understand that they must supply their pastors with at

least the necessities of life, ventured to engage a school-master, who, for a small salary, in addition to board and lodging in the priest's house, agreed to teach the school and play the harmonium on Sundays, so that in this way the lady who had hitherto taught the school was left free for the religious instructions and other work. About this time, too, a second father was added to the establishment, who was appointed to the charge of Abersychan, and to go occasionally to Blaenavon.

At Abersychan, an immense village gathered round the vast iron works, where the greater part of the Irish people are employed, a cottage was hired, in a room of which mass was said on Sundays, and instruction given to the children and others.

It was a poor ruinous sort of place, the ceiling so low that a tall man could not stand upright in it, and the walls were swarming with unmentionable and quite irrepressible creatures; but everything was done that poverty would allow to cleanse and adorn it for Him who chose a stable for His birthplace and a cross for his deathbed, and who still vouchsafes to come down from on high even to the meanest and poorest altar at the word of His priest.

For two years He thus vouchsafed to visit and be offered for His people every Sunday morning in this low crowded room, the congregation packed close to the very foot of the altar, so that it was like the days

of His earthly life by the Lake of Genneserate and the Sea of Galilee, where "the people pressed upon Him to hear the word of God."

Instructions were given on Saturday evenings, and again after the mass on Sunday morning, when Father Honorius hurried off to say a second mass at Blaenavon, another station about five miles distant among the hills.

Sunday was really a hard day; besides the morning's work, there were catechism classes all the Sunday afternoon at Pontypool, and often the fathers were called away for sick people to the extremest limits of the district; and then it seemed as if this were the only day of the week on which christenings, marriages, or any other ceremonies were considered valid, so impossible was it to persuade the people to choose some less occupied day for their performance.

These were days of hard work for all, but they were very happy days, and the more the work grew and increased under our hands the happier we were. God was very good, and let us see much fruit of our labour as an encouragement to proceed, although, when once we were well in harness and not likely to throw up the task, He let us meet with indifference, misunderstanding, and many hindrances even from those who, as far we could see, ought to have been the first to sympathise with and help us.

After all, the work is our part, the results are God's; and all we have to be anxious about is, to accomplish the task He sets before us—"with straw for our bricks" if He gives it—if not, to do the best we can without it; to work with instruments if He sends them to us, or without if He withholds them, or, what is more trying still, with such as break in our hands and pierce our hearts. God began the work of Creation without materials, and He took only a handful of dust out of which to create mankind; and it seems as if that work will please Him best, and prosper most, which is begun, as far as may be, on His own plan—without waiting for means and materials.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCHOOL AT PONTYPOOL PLACED UNDER GOVERNMENT INSPECTION — SCHOOL CHAPEL BUILT AT ABERSYCHAN.

"Needy, yet enriching many."

IN January, 1862, another step in advance was taken. It was decided to hire a large unoccupied room in the town for the school, and to place it under Government inspection. A certificated teacher from the Liverpool Training College was engaged, and here the Providence

of God led the selection in a wonderful way, for the teacher sent was just the one to sympathise with the struggling mission, and to put up with poverty and hardship for its sake, whilst at the same time she exercised a most sweet and winning influence on the children, and through them on the parents. Our school prospered exceedingly. The first examination passed off without a single failure, to the great joy alike of managers, teacher, and children.

It was the happiest and most joyous school imaginable; there was perfect harmony amongst all concerned, and the children were like members of one family with mutual interests and affections, though for the most part they were the same who only two years before had rushed into the church on their first school-day like a pack of wild animals.

And now, the school happily settled, the fathers, three in number, directed their energies to the building of a school chapel at Abersychan.

The club-room of a public-house had superseded the old cottage which had at first served as a chapel, but the disadvantages of this arrangement were manifold, one being that every Irishman who attended mass thought it his bounden duty to patronise the publican who allowed the use of the room, by drinking unlimited beer on his premises as soon as he could gain admittance on the Sunday evening.

It was useless to attempt to do battle with the vice of drunkenness so long as we stood on the enemy's own ground, so the wonderfully elastic poverty of St. Francis determined at once to find means to build a chapel for the Abersychan portion of the mission. Plans were drawn and estimates made by a friendly architect, and the question of how to raise £400 for the purpose of carrying them out seriously mooted.

Such a task is comparatively easy in a congregation where there is an admixture of prosperous tradespeople, or others of a wealthier class; but here there were none but the lowest class of labourers, and only two years ago their offerings did not suffice to maintain one priest: now three fathers, a lay brother, and a schoolmistress were getting a subsistence—somewhat scanty and precarious, it is true—from their alms, and that appeared to be the utmost stretch to which they could attain.

Nothing daunted, however, and without one anxiety on their own account, the fathers set to work.

First, every man, woman, and child in receipt of wages was induced to give the profits of one day to the building fund; the men also gave free labour to clear the ground and dig the foundations.

Then a tea-party was organised on a grand scale, at which, contrary to all precedent, the people provided their own tea and paid a shilling to be allowed to drink it; and most heartily they enjoyed themselves.

The charity of the poor is really unlimited. One poor widow, whose only livelihood was two shillings per week from the parish, volunteered to collect for the fathers on this occasion, and after walking about over the hills for a week, returned with her shoes worn out, indeed, but radiant with joy, having scraped together £1 in minute sums, and filled her basket to overflowing with packets of tea and sugar for the tea-party. All she asked or desired in return for her toil was a memento in the mass, and the father's blessing.

One day Father Elzear, when out begging in a neighbouring mission, entered a cottage to ask alms. The good woman of the house brought out her whole substance, consisting of one ounce of tea and one loaf of bread, and was about to share it with her visitor; but when he found how little she possessed he refused to deprive her of any portion of it, until she, with many tears and on her knees, besought him to take the half of what she had, and give her his blessing. The evening of that day the father's bag became so full that he was obliged to sell one loaf for threepence to pay his fare home!

But, notwithstanding all the begging, the evening entertainments, and other means, £200 was the utmost that could be raised; so £200 more had to be borrowed on interest in order to finish the work, and at last, in September, 1863, a plain substantial Gothic building,

perched on a breezy hill overlooking the smoke and turmoil of the iron furnaces, and the dingy rows of workmen's cottages, was opened for Divine worship, and dedicated to St. Francis.

The day of the opening was kept with pomp and festival. After an early mass offered up in the new building, the members of the Irish Club walked in procession, with bands playing and banners flying, down to the church at Pontypool, where high mass was sung, and a sermon preached, after which, accompanied by a second procession of school children, they marched in the same festive manner to the railway station to receive and welcome the Lady Patroness, the Honourable Mrs. Herbert, of Llanarth, and some members of her family, who kindly came over to give the encouragement of their presence to the poor Catholics of Pontypool and Abersychan.

Nothing so grand as the proceedings of this day had ever come within the range of their vision; they had always been looked upon as the dregs of the population, whilst the Catholic religion was associated in the minds of those about them with nothing but dirt, poverty, and degradation. It was, therefore, a stroke of policy to show the inhabitants of the place that our poor despised Irish people had friends and co-religionists among the rich and great of this world, and that ladies of gentle birth and refinement did not disdain to kneel side by

side with these "hewers of wood and drawers of water." It raised our people, too, a little in their own estimation, which in their case was likely to raise them in that of others, by making them aim at more decency in their homes and their appearance.

As a rule, Irish people will act as they see those about them expect them to act. If they find themselves looked upon as rogues and ruffians, they will with ready retaliation fulfil the expectations formed of them. If, on the contrary, you let them see that a good example is looked for, and that you even suppose them to be superior to their neighbours, they will go a great way to justify your good opinion. After this digression we must proceed to say, that in the afternoon of this memorable day there was a triumphal march of the Catholics back to Abersychan, where vespers were sung in the new school chapel, and an eloquent sermon was preached by Father Proctor, the Prior of the Dominican Fathers at Woodchester, who kindly came for the occasion, and thus forged another link in the long chain of friendship that unites the sons of St. Dominic with those of St. Francis.

A few months later, a second certificated teacher was engaged, and installed at Abersychan, and the school there was opened and placed under Government inspection. The choice of the teacher this time also was all that could be desired, and the work went on and prospered.

This same year some additions were made to the small and inconvenient building which had hitherto served as Presbytery at Pontypool. The ever widening and increasing work of the mission required additional fathers to carry it on, and the intention of the Capuchin Superiors, when accepting the charge of Pontypool, had been to establish a small community there as soon as ways and means could be found for doing so. The only ways and means yet found, it is true, were that more help was wanted, for there were no fresh sources of income discovered, nor did any benefactor step forward to contribute to the support of the fathers, their missions or schools; it was only that their faith in the Providence of God increased with their increase of work, and they knew that, if He gave them work to do, He would feed them as He feeds the birds of the air. He had never left them destitute, and they could trust Him for all they needed for their work, and their own necessities.

Straits, and trials, and difficulties are the very atmosphere in which they live; but they know well that, even if a Red Sea block up their way, or mountains intervene, the arm of the Lord can make a dry pathway through the waters, and cast the mountains into the sea.

Now, there were souls to be saved, the poor of Christ to be rescued, the lost sheep to be sought after; and accordingly, taking no thought for the morrow, what

they should eat, or what they should drink, or where-with they should be clothed, three more fathers came to share the toil and poverty, the heat and burden of the day, with the simplicity and childlike confidence which have always been the chief characteristics of the sons of St. Francis—"poor, yet possessing all things."

Three new rooms and a refectory were added to the original house, for the accommodation of the increasing community, and the small sacristy of the church was enlarged so as to allow of a room being built over it.

During the process of building but one room remained habitable, and this the Superior insisted on giving up to the rest of the religious, he himself sleeping about in the passage, or the church, or wherever there was a little bit of roof left for shelter. A piece of ground was subsequently added to the garden, and a high wall built round the premises, which now assumed quite a monastic appearance.

CHAPTER V.

CWMBRAN.

"What are these among so many?"—ST. JOHN vi. 9.

"We are cast down, but we perish not."—2 COR. iv. 9.

IN 1864, the fathers, at the request of the venerated and beloved bishop of the diocese, included in the

district under their charge the wide straggling village of Cwmbran, about five miles from Pontypool, where about 380 Catholics are employed in the furnaces and extensive iron-works which have sprung up there in the last few years.

With the exception of two or three families who occasionally went to mass at Newport or Pontypool, and to confession when a priest came over from the former place to give them an opportunity of attending to their religious duties, the Irish people had sunk into a state of utter indifference to religion, or, indeed, to anything beyond their daily or nightly toil and unlimited beer-drinking, which formed their one idea of bliss. The work was always going on night and day, Sundays and week-days alike, without pause or respite, until men lost all account of time, and hardly knew even when the Sundays came round. Nothing so tends to deaden all sense and feeling, moral and intellectual, as the unnaturalness of working by night and sleeping by day; and the want of the Sunday's break in the monotony of labour turns the workman into a mere machine, that goes grinding on and on without thought or volition. Men who work by night constantly are almost without exception either asleep or drunk all the rest of their lives.

A boy who leaves school, as they often do in spite of Factory Acts, at 10 years of age, bright and intelligent, becomes so changed, and dulled, and stupefied after a

few months of alternate night and day work as scarcely to be recognisable. Men have been known to work at a stretch from Friday morning to Sunday morning, when they would come home so utterly knocked up that, without waiting for food, and too exhausted to go another step to their beds, they would fling themselves on the floor of their cottage and sleep for hours without moving. To expect men reduced to this slavish and almost brutal condition to make the effort to walk five miles to mass was quite out of the question.

One evening I entered a cottage at Cwmbran, where a begrimed unshaven Irishman was sitting down to a comfortless meal of weak tea and bread-and-butter; he looked so utterly done up that he certainly seemed to require more substantial food, and, on inquiring why he did not have meat or bacon, he told me that he was working long spells—that is, fifteen or sixteen hours at a stretch—and he got so puzzled he could never tell the day of the week, and so he was “afeard” he might eat meat on a Friday if he did not “stick to bread-and-butter!” This poor fellow had not been to his Easter duties for years, and had only heard mass on Sunday two or three times during that period; but to eat meat on Friday appeared to him “in lowest depths a lower still” of degradation.

Amongst these toil-worn deadened souls the sons of St. Francis went to labour. No room large enough

to contain a congregation was to be found, save, as usual, the club-room of a public-house, to which they were made extremely welcome for the sum of two shillings and sixpence per week. Unlike the inn-keepers of Bethlehem, the publicans of this neighbourhood, with one exception, were always ready to welcome a priest and his congregation; but the motive of their civility is one that would make the priest avoid accepting it, if possible, for it is the hope of being well repaid by the gratitude of the Irish, who are only too willing to show their appreciation of the benefit by getting drunk afterwards on the premises. The club-room, however, was engaged for the Sundays. An altar was formed of a table raised on four bricks to give it sufficient height, its unsightly legs being concealed by an antependium. The reredos consisted of the backs of three tall chairs, covered with a piece of red baize: a clean linen altar-cloth, a crucifix, a couple of bright brass candlesticks, and a few vases of flowers, gave a devotional appearance to the contrivance. The "asperges" was given from a soup-plate, with a small branch of yew-tree; the cruets were two usually used for vinegar or pepper. Everything was in the extreme of poverty. The room was reached by a sort of ladder, the ceiling was almost on our heads, and it required great skill to get safely across the rickety floor. Moreover, as there was frequently a club meeting late on the

Saturday evening, when the father arrived at 8 o'clock on Sunday morning the first thing he had to do was to take a broom and sweep away the abundant traces of the late carouse, before arranging the altar and benches for the mass.

Underneath the room was an old stable inhabited by families of pigs, whose incessant grunting was somewhat disturbing, to say nothing of the unsavoury odours rising through the broken floor.

Our Lord, however, did not disdain to come and meet His people in this poor shelter, not unlike His first earthly dwellingplace; and His compassionate Heart surely rejoiced over the newly-awakened devotion of His lost sheep at Cwmbran, who had so long lived in forgetfulness of Him, but were now, after long years, kneeling at His feet.

The afternoon was devoted to teaching the children, but of the forty who scrambled into the club-room the first Sunday only three could make the sign of the cross, or repeat the simplest prayer; they seemed hardly to know the name of God, and, in fact, were more utterly destitute of ideas of any kind than any children we had met with. It was some time before anything beyond staring with round eyes and wide-opened mouths could be got out of them.

In the course of a few Sundays, however, by insisting on the parents teaching the little they themselves knew

during the week, the brightest of them could repeat the Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary, and answer a few simple questions. It took about six months to teach them the Ten Commandments, and three more to prepare them for confession; but when once that was accomplished the task was easier, for ignorant children or grown people always seem more intelligent after they have been to the Sacrament of penance, and the cloud that sin had spread over their minds has been dispelled.

They lacked the brightness and ingenuousness of the Pontypool children; a weariness and heaviness always hung about them; but they became very docile and obedient, and that was the most that could be expected from them.

After two years' sojourn in the club-room, a sudden inspiration came to the father who served the mission; as he was preaching one Sunday during mass, he suddenly paused in the midst of his discourse, and said, "My dear brethren, we must have a chapel built at Cwmbran."

The very same thought struck the superior at Pontypool at the very same moment, and when once he had received such an inspiration no hindrance could stop him from beginning the work. It was one of unusual difficulty, for the bitterness of the Protestants at Cwmbran was so intense that for along time no one could be found brave enough to undergo the obloquy attendan

upon letting the "*Papists*" have a piece of ground; and, when at last a quarter of an acre was, as we thought, secured, a petition to the owner was got up, numerously signed, to induce him to withdraw his promise of letting it for the purpose required, and it was some time before we could get possession.

It was not a favourable situation, but there was no other to be had, and so it was taken on a long lease at a rent of £6 per annum.

The newly-awakened Catholics of Cwmbran acted nobly. They gave free labour to clear the ground and to dig the foundations, and out of their hard-earned wages subscribed £30 in the course of a few months towards the cost of the building. About £150 was begged, and the rest of the sum required lent by a benefactor, and in six weeks' time an iron building capable of accommodating 250 people was ready for Divine worship.

On the Feast of the Circumcision, January 1st, 1867, the new chapel, dedicated to "Our Lady of the Angels," was solemnly blessed and opened. The Very Rev. R. B. Vaughan, then Prior of the Benedictine Monastery, Belmont, near Hereford, now coadjutor Archbishop of Sydney, preached a most eloquent sermon on the occasion.

Five dissenting chapels, in which the preachers, Sunday after Sunday, hurl anathemas from their pulpits

against the "Papists," surround our meek-looking chapel, standing as a little Goshen amid the Egyptian darkness. It was for some time no unusual occurrence for stones to be hurled against the windows during Mass or Benediction, for the priest to be spit upon on his way to the station, and for the Catholics to be insulted as they left the chapel door; and such things, indeed, still happen occasionally; but, notwithstanding all hindrances, there never was a more faithful little band of Catholics than the depressed trodden-down Irish people of Cwmbran became after a few years' work amongst them.

The children—for the most part boys—who first came to learn their prayers and catechism in the club-room, did not slacken in their attendance at the new chapel; neither cold, nor rain, nor snow ever prevented them from trooping down from their homes, or from the works, whenever instructions were given; and after they had made their first communion they still came, many of them, until they were quite grown up; and to this day there is scarcely a congregation to be found so large a proportion of which consists of boys and young men.

Another characteristic of the Cwmbran Catholics has always been their readiness to contribute to the support of the priest, and the requirements of the mission. Some of them would live a week on bread and water

rather than be behindhand with their monthly contribution, or their subscription to the Altar Society.

They are, moreover, always ready to do any service they can for their pastor, or any work that may be required about the chapel, and would be quite hurt if payment were offered to them in return.

The number of Catholics varies from time to time, as the works prosper or the reverse, from 350 to 250, including children; but the yearly receipts from the mission are seldom less than £60, and £7 in addition is contributed for the Altar Society, besides £1 per annum for the Poor School Committee, and other public collections.

In 1868 the school was opened, and placed under Government inspection. The teacher appointed proved remarkably able and clever, and in a short time as many Protestants as Catholics flocked in—so many of the former, in fact, that for a time the neighbouring British School had to be closed for lack of scholars.

Our ungracious neighbours of the Bethels and Elims around never forgave us for this, and in course of time took their revenge by electing a School Board, which got possession of a piece of ground exactly opposite and close to our school, where they erected an imposing and spacious set of buildings for boys, girls, and infant schools.

Threats of temporal and spiritual punishment, of loss

of employment here and of heaven hereafter, were held out to all Protestant parents who, after the opening of the new buildings, ventured to send their children to the "Irish" school, as ours was contemptuously called. The preachers, not content with denouncing us from their pulpits, went from house to house threatening and cajoling the members of their flock into taking away their children from our dangerous influence, and for a few months they succeeded. We bided our time, however, and quietly proceeded to enlarge our borders by adding a chancel to our existing building, and thus gaining additional space both for chapel and school-room. And now, after the lapse of six months since the opening of the Board School, the empty places in our benches are filled again, and many more children than we can accommodate apply to be taken into the despised "Irish" school, where they find by experience that they are much better taught and cared for than in any other.

Moreover, not a child will leave the school before the prayers are said, although they are repeatedly told that they are at liberty to do so.

Many Catholics at a distance are surprised that we receive Protestant children in our schools at all, or at least that we seem to encourage their attendance. In many places, no doubt, it might not answer; but in these missions, where Catholics are all of the lowest class,

and even in a minority of that class, we find the plan answer well. In places like Cwmbran, for instance, where the number of Catholic children is so small that a school could not be supported for them alone, by admitting other children we secure an increased Government grant, and a larger amount of school pence. Then, again, while we have full control over our own children, and can keep them whenever we choose for religious instruction, the Protestant children at the same time are under good moral influence, and the prejudices they have imbibed against Catholics entirely disappear from their own minds, and a great many from the minds of their parents also, so that hatred to the Catholic faith generally dies out, and in future years this happy change may lead to further results. To clear away traditional prejudice seems to be a special work of this generation; and, when once the ground is cleared, who knows what beautiful structure may hereafter arise upon it?

CHAPTER VI.

BLAENAVON.

"And therefore we strive earnestly, whether absent or present, to please Him."—2 Cor. v. 9.

HAVING brought up the account of the Cwmbran Mission so far, we must now turn back to give some

account of other missions that were set on foot during the same period.

About six miles from Pontypool, in the opposite direction to Cwmbran stands, or rather straggles, the unfinished town of Blaenavon.

The railroad from Pontypool thither runs through a narrow valley, deep down between steep wooded heights, and fertilized by the little river Avon Llwydd, which leaps and races along its rocky bed towards the works lower down, where it has to be so busy all day and night, among the vast machinery and the incessant whirr of the engines. The streets of the town are built, for the most part, on the slope of a steep hill, and generally end in unfinished houses, as if the effort to climb higher had proved too much for them.

Blaenavon is completely a colony of colliers and iron-workers. No one would dream of residing there unless in some way connected with the mines or works. Of course there are shops to supply the needs of the inhabitants, and there is a vast army of publicans, who profess to supply the means of quenching their thirst, but seem rather to do their best to increase it. Dissenting chapels—Elims, Bethels, Ebenezers, &c.—rival the public-houses in number and variety. It is no uncommon thing for father and mother, and each member of a family, to belong to a different sect; and children have been heard in high dispute as to which

of their preachers was the best, not as regarded the discharge of his spiritual duties, but as to his worldly position.

“Ah! my minister is a butcher, and he makes more money than *your’n*, as is *on’y* a tailor,” a brother was overheard saying to his sister.

There is a grey calm-looking old parish church, surrounded with trees, standing aside from the busy half-finished streets, as if it had given up in despair the hope of attracting the wild impulsive population, who seem to have no taste whatever for the quiet and somewhat monotonous ministrations of the venerable clergyman who serves it.

Mingled here and there amid the heterogeneous elements of the place, an Irish family was to be found, with very little of what they brought from their own country, save a love of whisky, and a notoriety for being foremost in a row.

There was, however, one family of respectable tradespeople—good and devout Catholics—who tried their best to keep alive some little religion in their poorer neighbours: they kindly offered the use of a room in their house to the fathers, one of whom went over once a fortnight to say mass and give instructions there. A small congregation was thus gathered together, and some influence for good exercised over its members. After two years, however, this good family fell into great

misfortunes, and was dispersed abroad ; but the fathers, unwilling to give up the work begun in Blaenavon, hired a room over a shop in the town, and fitted it up as a temporary chapel. It was a wretched place, and accessible only by a sort of tall step-ladder, of so very insecure a nature that it fell down bodily one day as the priest was warily descending it, and deposited him in the heaps of rubbish below.

Such was the state of affairs as regarded the Catholics of Blaenavon when, in the year 1864, there came to Pontypool a lady, a member of the Third Order of St. Francis, who about seven years previously had been received into the Church. Her intention in coming here was, in the first instance, to make a retreat under the direction of the fathers, and to have the advice of the superior about her vocation to the religious life.

She was, however, so impressed with the importance of the work going on in the district, and the great spiritual advantages to be derived to her own soul from a life of labour hidden from the world, that, when it became clear that she was not called to the life she had contemplated, she eventually settled down there, and devoted her energies and her intellectual powers, which were of a high order, to the furtherance of the mission work undertaken by the fathers of Pontypool.

Her health was always delicate, but an indomitable will ruled her frail body, and bore her up through an

amount of fatigue and hardship that would have daunted many much stronger than herself. Morning after morning, winter and summer alike, she knelt in her chosen place at the foot of Our Lady's altar at Pontypool, from the earliest hour the church was open until the last mass was said. Morning after morning she received the bread of life, uniting herself to Him who was, indeed, her Strength, her Spouse, her all ; and then through the day she laboured continually for Him, little heeding if the task itself were distasteful, or the toil severe ; for, with hands ever uplifted in sacrifice, and eyes gazing upon "Him who is invisible," she cared not for the thorns that tore her feet, or the rugged stones that wounded them, as she pressed onwards in the footsteps of her Beloved.

Blaenavon, being the least attractive portion of all the district, was for that very reason the one she most interested herself in ; and by means of her exertions and generosity a school chapel was built on a piece of ground high above the town, given for this purpose by a former benefactor. This building, dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, was blessed and opened for divine worship on the 18th of May, 1868. The Rev. Father Marshall, of Ross, preached on the occasion to a crowded congregation with his usual eloquence. Thus the mission was firmly established, so far as a permanent place for Catholic worship was secured. She of whom

we now speak devoted herself with redoubled energy to the task of instructing the wild and ignorant children and young people of the congregation. It was a difficult work, in the first place, to get them to attend, for they were for the most part quite beyond the control of their parents, and accustomed to follow only their own wild wills from the time they first went to work, which was almost as soon as they could find their way through the streets. When, after a process of alternate coaxing and threatening, they were induced to come, it was a task indeed to fix their roving attention, and, as scarcely one child could read a letter of a book, prayers and catechism had to be hammered into their dense heads by incessant repetition, so that it was months before any sensible progress was made.

With unwearied diligence, however, their kind instructress laboured at this, to her, uncongenial task, for her inclination led her more to the contemplative than the active life, and she had naturally a dislike to teaching, and no special attraction to children; but, if it had been the work of her heart's dearest choice, she could not have performed it more earnestly or more lovingly.

One, and often two, evenings in the week, braving winter storms and summer heat, she climbed the long steep hill from the station to the chapel; and, as there was no train returning to Pontypool late enough to allow her to gather her children together after their

day's work and then return home, she generally remained all night in the sacristy, taking such snatches of sleep as she might get sitting in a wooden chair, and returned home by an early train, which brought her to Pontypool in time for mass the following morning.

Every alternate Sunday one of the fathers went to Blaenavon to say mass, and this faithful coadjutor managed the little choir, played the harmonium, arranged the altar and the sacristy, and taught the children in the afternoon. On the Sunday when there was no mass she still went there, said the rosary with the people, instructed all who chose to come, and visited the sick or negligent at their own homes. Unweariedly she carried on her work, even after she was attacked by the terrible illness which ended in her death, and which for a long time she neither heeded nor spoke of. He for whom she laboured, and who is now her "Reward exceeding great," only knows what she secretly suffered and offered up to Him in her hidden toil and her long night watches in the little chapel at Blaenavon.

At last the time came when her sufferings could no longer be concealed, and when the frail body waxed too feeble to obey the firm strong will. For a fortnight before her last Christmas on earth (in 1869) she devoted herself with redoubled energy to the little flock she loved so well. Days and nights were spent in

preparing for the coming festival, and when it came she led her last communion class to the foot of the altar, for the last time sang the "Venite Adoremus," and when the day was over her earthly task was done.

She returned home that night utterly prostrate, and in acute suffering. Shortly afterwards she consented to go up to London for advice, and for a time we hoped she might return, but our Lord knew how she longed to go home to Him. Through seven months of suffering, so great that those who witnessed it could scarce endure the sight, she lingered on; and yet, through all that time of sharp trial, so ardent was her love to our Lord, so great her yearning to be in His presence, that until a comparatively short time before her death she assisted constantly at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and when this became impossible she used, as long as her malady permitted, to receive Holy Communion at home.

When the end came it seemed as if every wish of her heart were to be fulfilled. She had asked for suffering, and for her purgatory in this life, and it was given her in full measure. She had desired to receive our Lord daily unto the end, and till the end was very near this grace was granted her. Her great devotion to the Holy See and the Vicar of Christ made her once express a wish to have his blessing, and it was sent to her as she lay dying. She had great love for the Feast

of Portiuncula (Aug. 2), and frequently said what a glorious thing it would be to die on that day, and be wafted up to heaven by the prayers offered in the Franciscan churches all over the world ; and it was on the 2nd of August, 1870, that she entered into her rest.

Two sisters of the Poor Clares, to whose order she was much attached, clothed her in the Franciscan habit for her last sleep ; and on the 6th August, the Feast of the Transfiguration, the body that had toiled and suffered so bravely was laid to rest, as she had desired, under the shadow of the sanctuary, in the peaceful little churchyard of St. Mary's Catholic Church at Chislehurst ; and so she who had suffered with our Lord on earth went, as we surely hope, to reign with Him in His kingdom.

It seemed as though the little mission of Blaenavon must be broken up now it could no longer have her fostering care and her generous help ; but, on the contrary, her prayers in heaven have proved more powerful even than her labour and sacrifice on earth.

Everything that is undertaken for the benefit of the mission seems to prosper. Subscriptions come in from most unexpected sources ; work that is accomplished after years of toil and difficulty in other missions succeeds in Blaenavon with little effort, and meets with no opposition. A school has been opened for the Catholics, and placed under Government inspection,

and it is crowded with children. We are obliged to refuse admission to many more, whom we cannot accommodate for want of space.

The parents of the Protestant children, who form about two-thirds of the number, make no objection whatever to their joining in the Catholic prayers; and it is a touching sight to see all their little hands devoutly making the sign of the cross, and to hear the lips that might under other circumstances have been taught to mock her name invoke the holy Mother of God.

We may hope and pray that, when these dear children are old enough to think and act for themselves, many of them will remember their early Catholic training, and adhere loyally to the Church under whose shadow they were brought up.

CHAPTER VII.

RISCA.

"Come over and help us."—Acts xvi. 9.

"Also when we were come our flesh had no rest."—2 Cor. vii. 5.

ABOUT six miles from the town of Newport, on the Western Valley's line of railway, stands the village of Risca. Its situation is charming. Two narrow valleys that for some miles have wound river-like among the hills

converge at this point, and widen out into a fertile plain which lies smiling and restful amid the encircling hills.

Here and there irregular streets or clusters of houses nestle down in the recesses of the mountains, or along the green valley, and these are the dwellings of the colliers and other labourers employed in the mines and tin-plate works of the neighbourhood.

The scene is so calm and peaceful, one can scarcely imagine that under the surface of those undulating hills, where the lights and shadows play over the green pastures and waving woods, thousands of men and boys are toiling with fierce unceasing labour, hacking and hewing their way through the masses of coal that are stored up as in a dark deep treasure-house.

Yet so it is : all those heavy truck-loads of coal that are incessantly departing from the little station have been wrenched out from the black labyrinths that turn and twist for miles under the earth, by the strong sinewy arms of the Risca colliers.

Fearful catastrophes, too, have from time to time disturbed the calm of the valley. The dreaded sound of fire-damp explosions has boomed through the stillness, and then a moment's silent thrill of horror is succeeded by the shrieks of terrified mothers, wives, and children rushing from their homes to the mouth of the coal-pit to learn the terrible tidings of who among them has been bereft of son, or husband, or father.

A few days later, and a long procession of coffins, wherein the strong men lie stiff and still, and the sinewy arms motionless, has been carried along the valley to the old churchyard, followed by a mournful train of weeping mothers, widows, and orphans, and sorrowing comrades. For a time after this awful visitation sadness and desolation reign over the plains and among the hills where the shadow of death has brooded, and then the routine of labour goes on as before, and calm and peace return again to the sweet green valley.

About thirty Irish families are scattered here and there in and about Risca, and for many years one of the Fathers of Charity from Newport went over occasionally to give them the opportunity of hearing Mass and receiving the Sacraments at least once during the twelve months; but, from the ever-increasing pressure of work at Newport, they were unable to do more for the spiritual wants of Risca Catholics. The children were growing up in ignorance of their religion, and many of the parents gradually letting their faith slip away from them in the incessant contact and intercourse with those to whom the name of Catholic was known only as a by-word of reproach. From hiding their religion, they were fast growing to ignore it, when the attention of the Franciscan Fathers was attracted to their condition in the following manner.

It happened, one Sunday afternoon during the period

of the sojourn in the club-room at Cwmbran, that two stranger boys appeared amongst the usual attendants at the afternoon instructions. They listened with eager surprised faces to question, answer, and explanation, and, when the lesson was over, and the rest of the children crowded round their teacher, joyful and smiling, for a few minutes' talk, the two strangers stood apart looking wistful and sad. On inquiring whence they came they said, "From Risca, over the mountain," and added, with most pathetic look and tone, "Nobody comes there to teach us catechism."

A conversation ensued in which many details of Risca and its few isolated Catholics were learnt, and an interest was thus awakened in them which never slumbered, but made us always on the alert to find some means of helping them. The sad faces of these two Risca lads, and their anxiety for instruction, seemed continually calling, like St. Paul's Macedonian vision, for some one to come over and help them. Soon afterwards the bishop of the diocese, ever watchful over the remotest portion of the flock committed to his charge, begged the Franciscan Fathers of Pontypool to undertake the charge of the Risca Catholics, and very gladly they answered the call. There were many obstacles in the way of establishing a mission there to be served from Pontypool, owing to the distance and the very inconvenient arrangement of trains, which involved a great waste of time on

the journey; but it was finally settled that one of the fathers should go to Risca every week, and do what was possible under existing circumstances. One of the Catholics there gladly offered the use of his cottage for mass on Sunday morning, but he had no spare room for the priest, who, on account of the distance, and the lack of Sunday trains, had to go there on Saturday evening. In vain the good father traversed the length and breadth of the valley, asking for a lodging for the night at every inn or house that seemed likely to afford such accommodation; so deeply ingrained was the prejudice of the Protestant population that none dared risk the opprobrium consequent on entertaining a priest under his roof. As for the Master, so for His servant—"there was no room in the inn."

The disciples of St. Francis, however, are not to be deterred from performing the work to which they are called by such trifling considerations as want of a bedroom. Very contentedly the father stretched himself for the night on a mattress laid on the floor of the one cottage open to him, and rose early on the following morning to prepare the same room to serve in turn as a chapel.

Some weeks later, a lady residing in London, whose successful exertions in the cause of Catholic education are well known, having heard of the poor Risca children, kindly devoted the few weeks of the year which

she allows herself for change and recreation to the task of preparing them for confession and Holy Communion, living during the time in a small cottage which, being vacant, she rented for the purpose. Thus, the almost dying embers of the faith in the Risca Valley were fanned into life; the poor despised Irish began to lift up their heads and venture to practise their religion; and, as time went on, the cottage room where mass was said proved quite insufficient for the congregation, and the building of a chapel began to be seriously contemplated.

The fathers again appealed to the charity of the faithful to aid them, and collected a sufficient sum to justify them in securing a piece of ground and beginning to build.

A considerable sum was also procured by the late Captain Jacob, a convert, who resided for a time in the district, and who took the greatest interest in furthering this object. The remainder was kindly supplied by the bishop of the diocese, and another benefactor, who lent a sum of money on interest for the completion of the building; and thus, after the lapse of two years from the time the father took charge of the mission, a small Gothic chapel, simple, but firmly built, stood in the smiling valley; and on the 12th of August, 1868, the Holy Sacrifice was offered there, for the first time after the lapse of three hundred years, in a sanctuary of the

true faith.* The Rev. Dr. Marshall, of Ross, preached a beautiful and touching sermon on the occasion, on our Lord's humility, specially as evinced in His choice of an earthly dwellingplace.

And, now that the work was fairly started, the Providence of God sent another helper to foster the infant mission into more vigorous life. Another lady also came to Pontypool for the purpose of making a retreat, and, seeing our need of help, subsequently devoted herself with zeal and earnestness to the cause of the Risca Mission. In the first place, her energies were directed to the task of paying off as much as possible of the debt which the fathers had incurred in order to complete the building of the chapel. For this purpose, after months of hard labour of brain and hand, she organised a bazaar, which was held in the Town Hall at Pontypool, under the patronage and with the active co-operation of the family of J. A. Herbert, Esq., of Llanarth Court, and the Hon. Mrs. Herbert. The proceeds of the bazaar, after deducting all expenses, amounted to £100—a large sum to be obtained for Catholic purposes in this remote corner of the world. This was a considerable relief to

* The parish church of Risca is of very ancient foundation; on taking down a part of it for the purpose of repairing it, a few years ago, the skeleton of a man, supposed to have been a monk, was discovered, enclosed in the wall, the bony fingers still grasping a rosary. A bead of this rosary came into the possession of Captain Jacob, who had it inserted in a silver cross, and placed in the Tabernacle door of our little chapel, thus linking the present with the past.

the fathers, whose scanty resources are much crippled by the strain of providing yearly interest for the debts they have necessarily incurred in carrying on their work.

For two years the same kind friend supported, and personally superintended, the school, and laboured with unflagging love and zeal to instruct the Risca Catholics to ameliorate their condition, and they will always hold her in grateful and loving remembrance.

CHAPTER VIII.

BLACKWOOD AND ABERTILLERY.

"In this present time let your abundance supply their want."—
2 Cor. viii. 14.

THERE now remain two more missions still in their infancy to be spoken of, where as yet there is no building we can call our own, no abiding shelter for our divine Lord, no safe fold where His little ones can be trained up in His faith and love.

At Blackwood, the central town for about 200 Catholics, the school has been held on week-days, and mass said on Sundays, in a house rented for the purpose by the kindness of Mr. Herbert, of Llanarth.

The only room large enough for the purpose is low

and damp, and, as the floor is flagged and the walls not the required height, the school cannot be placed, like the rest, under Government inspection. Here, on Sunday mornings, there has always been a faithful congregation of the very poorest class of Catholics, whom neither storm, nor cold, nor distance could ever deter from gathering together in the humble room where the altar was raised, and the Holy Sacrifice offered up. At Easter time it is rarely indeed that any member of the little flock neglects his duties, and, poor as they are, their pennies are always ready to put into the offertory plate, and to give the collector for the support of the priest and the mission.

Now notice has been given by the owner to the fathers to leave the house, which, on account of its many inconveniences, they would gladly do if another were to be had, but none seems attainable. The fathers themselves are too heavily burdened with debt to undertake another building on credit, and, unless the charity of some yet unknown benefactor rises up to aid them, the poor Blackwood Catholics will be deprived of the Holy Sacrifice, of the Sacraments, and of the school for their children.

Abertillery lies deep in the wildest of the wild recesses among the hills. To reach it by rail from Pontypool or Newport, the traveller must proceed by the line that leads under the marvellous Crumlin Viaduct, spun, like

a gigantic spider's web, from rock to rock, over a deep ravine ; and, after wandering in and out among the narrow defiles cleft between the mountains, he will reach his bourne. The streets of the town or village (if streets they may be called) are perched about on every ledge that can be found on the hills, or struggle up their steep sides, as if in the vain attempt to find a level ridge to hang themselves upon. Here and there gigantic furnaces fling out volumes of flame and smoke, or a yawning shaft shows where the busy colliers are burrowing under the rugged surface. The ceaseless din of wheel and hammer echoes and re-echoes among these hills, that seem as if they were meant but to shelter the valley from the busy world that has forced its way in spite of them into its wild depths.

Instead of the dreamy shepherds and plodding farm labourers that one would expect to see in so remote and sheltered a spot, grimy colliers and bronzed ironworkers fight through their turbulent lives. Ireland has contributed her quota to the busy population, which is noted even in this semi-barbarous land for ignorance and brutality. Here, too, as elsewhere, the minority have only been too ready to follow the multitude in doing evil ; and the baptized Catholic in most cases is not to be distinguished from his unbelieving neighbour, unless, alas ! that he is frequently more reckless and turbulent. Occasionally some of these poor people would trudge

over the hills to Pontypool or Abersychan, bringing a child to be christened, or to beg one of the fathers to go over and administer the last Sacraments to a dying person; and thus that wild and uncared-for district became known, and that yearning to save souls, which Franciscans inherit from their father and founder, could not be appeased without an endeavour to bring these poor people within reach of the means of grace. In vain, however, they sought for a cottage that might serve as a temporary chapel: the only shelter here, as elsewhere, was the inevitable club-room adjoining a public-house. Here, then, the humble altar was raised whenever a priest could be spared for the Sunday, and the Divine Victim was offered. Such, however, is the low state of moral and religious feeling, that it is with the greatest difficulty the congregation can be prevented from hovering about after the service until the public-house is opened, and there and then evincing their gratitude to the landlord by an unlimited consumption of his beer.

The fathers cannot allow this state of affairs to continue, nor yet can they leave the people in their present state of heathenism. They have ventured, therefore, to secure a piece of ground on which to erect a plain and simple building to serve as chapel, and hereafter as school. On the 5th October, 1875, the foundation-stone was laid by Bishop Hedley, coadjutor of Newport and

Meneria, who walked with the fathers over the hills from Pontypool to Abertillery, through mist and rain, to begin the work with the blessing and prayer of the Church. And, now that they have begun in faith and hope in their great poverty, surely some hearts will be touched, and some as yet unknown benefactors stretch out a helping hand. Some who have all the luxuries of religion—who can go on pilgrimage, and kindle their devotion by visiting holy shrines, and worship daily before altars rich with precious gifts, and glowing with light and flowers—will surely, out of gratitude for their own privileges, help to provide our Lord a poor shelter in this wilderness where He can meet His people. He can, indeed, say, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air their nests,” for every sect of Dissenters has its little conventicle, and Satan has palaces innumerable for his work; but “the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head.”

In their rude toiling lives, passed in a fierce struggle for bread, amid the scorching furnaces or the dismal coal-pits, these poor Catholics have nothing to remind them of Him. Perhaps for years and years since they left Ireland in their youth they have never known the rest and joy of kneeling before the altar in a Catholic church, and their children have never seen one; all that is so familiar to Catholic children in more favoured regions is strange to them. They have never

learnt to love the Virgin Mother or the Child Jesus; indeed, they scarcely know how they come to be in this world at all. The only answer to be obtained from them when asked, "Who made you?" was a stare of astonishment, until one adventurous urchin, in a puzzled tone, replied, "'Spose 'twas mother!" These little wanderers that are as dear to the Sacred Heart as those who are ever in their Father's house, and it is to be hoped many of those who know the joy of that home will help to bring them within reach of the welcome, and the new robe, and the holy feast of the Sacraments, within the shelter of Mary's love, and their guardian angels' wings, even here, where heaven seems ignored and God forgotten.

CHAPTER IX.

"I have other sheep also, . . . and them must I bring, and they shall hear My voice."—ST. JOHN x. 16.

AND now, having sketched out the beginning and progress of the mission, a last chapter must be added for the detail of one or two circumstances of interest which were omitted in order not to break the thread of the narrative.

It has often been a matter of surprise to those who are interested in the work of Catholic missions in this part of the country, and in Wales, that so few Welsh people are converted to the faith; a conversion amongst them is a very rare occurrence, so much so that we are accustomed to say, "it requires more than a miracle to convert a Welshman." And yet there linger amongst the Welsh many Catholic traditions and customs. Many of them, for instance, have great faith in holy water, and will come to ask for it, if any one is sick in the house; and yet for the most part they are intensely prejudiced against Catholics. Whether it be the inherent obstinacy of their nature, or a sort of innate deceitfulness which is characteristic of them, and which prevents the reception of truth, as oil refuses to mingle with water, the fact remains that, notwithstanding every opportunity given them of knowing the doctrines of the Church, her teaching seldom attracts or convinces them.

There are, however, here and there very notable exceptions, and a Welshman once thoroughly convinced and converted is a treasure of faith and firmness. For several years after Father Elzear's arrival in Pontypool, an elderly woman of rather uncouth appearance, with dark tanned face and hard features, used to come, in an impulsive desultory way and at all sorts of odd times, to the church, and entreat to have her confession heard, and to be allowed to have Holy Communion, without a

moment's delay, as if it were a matter of life and death. She accounted for her appearance at specially inconvenient times by telling the fathers that her husband was a Welshman, and so "contrary" that she could only get to church by stealth when he was out of the way.

Once she appeared at six o'clock in the evening, having fasted all day, waiting for an opportunity to get out, and could hardly be persuaded to go away without having her desire gratified. The poor creature, when in church, used to pray with such fervour that one was always reminded of the words of our Lord, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away." It seemed as if her dark face were transformed into a power that must draw down an answer and could not be denied. Her prayers were for her husband's conversion, which seemed as unlikely an event as could possibly happen. He was sixty years of age, too old to take in a completely new world of ideas, and so bitterly opposed that he could scarcely bear to hear the name of Catholic.

It chanced, however, to the woman's great astonishment, that he offered one Christmas Day to go with her to the high mass. She accompanied him trembling, but with a lurking joy in her heart, as she said, for she felt it could only be an inspiration from above that had prompted him to this unexpected step. After the Mass there followed Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The husband, whose name was William Jones, a fine tall stout man, with a grey head, long flowing white beard, and a remarkably intelligent face, with a grave earnest expression, sat through the service immovable, his eyes fixed on the altar and the priest, whilst his wife knelt in an agony of prayer by his side. The service over, they went home in silence, and for some days not a word passed between them on the subject; the man sat mending his umbrellas (for that was his trade), grave and thoughtful; whilst the woman went about her household duties, secretly watching him, but, as she said, her heart was praying all the time. One afternoon, a few days after this Christmas Day, Father Elzear chanced to pass their house, and, to the old lady's astonishment, her husband went to the door and called after him, entreating him to enter. He of course complied; the poor man closed the door, gave him a chair, and then somewhat shyly said, "Oh, sir, will you be so kind as to explain something that happened when I was in your church on Christmas Day?" "Certainly, and with great pleasure," replied the father. "Well, sir, you took a shining thing out of that little cupboard on the altar, and lifted it high up, and set it where all the folk could see it; and when I looked up at it I saw the figure of a beautiful little boy in the middle of it. It was the most beautiful little man I ever saw, and I'd like to know how you made that representation."

Father Elzear was much struck; he saw that the man was deeply in earnest, and felt that our Blessed Lord must have appeared to him as the Monstrance was raised on the throne for Benediction; so he took down from the shelf the well-worn Bible, and read, in the Protestant version, as it stood there, the sixth chapter of St. John's gospel, explaining as he went on about the gift of the Bread of Life, and how our Lord's promise of it was fulfilled in the Blessed Sacrament. Jones listened with folded hands, and tears streaming down his cheeks. Here was what he had sought for so long, and tried one sect after another in the vain hope they could give it him. There was no hesitation, no questioning, no difficulty in his full free acceptance of the truth. The light of faith shone straight into his mind without a cloud to intercept it. He begged at once to be instructed and received into the Church. Day after day he came, catechism in hand, and eagerly, and with the simplicity of a child, drank in those holy beautiful truths; and on the Feast of St. Patrick, a little more than two months after his wonderful vision, he was baptized. His desire to receive Holy Communion was almost overbalanced by his dread of receiving his Lord unworthily; and, when the morning came that this great privilege was to be his, and he was to feed upon his God, he approached the altar with trembling steps, his face bathed in tears of peni-

tence and joy. It so happened that, the same morning, a little child of ten years old made his first communion in the same mass, and they knelt side by side, the grey-headed man, so far on life's journey, and the little child just entering upon it; and it was hard to say which of the two had the most childlike heart, for, if ever there was one of whom it might be said late in life, "Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," it was this convert. He lived about seven years after this the life of a saint, and his death was such that every one who witnessed its approach might well say, "May my last end be like his!"

One pain and regret alone troubled his soul—that he had not known the truth sooner, and so had a longer time to serve his Lord, instead of wandering outside the fold for so many years. One day Father Elzear told him the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard—how that some were called early in the morning, and others not until evening, yet all received the same reward; whereupon he raised himself up, saying eagerly, "Give me my crucifix, give me my crucifix!" And in a rapture of devotion he kissed it again and again, repeating, "Even at the eleventh hour, even at the eleventh hour!"

The wife, who had been so unwearied in her prayers for her husband's conversion, now they were so fully answered, seemed scarcely able to understand the

height of spirituality to which he had reached, and fancied the devil must be puffing him up with pride; and therefore, all through his last sufferings, when every one else was edified by his extreme patience and humility, she thought it her duty perpetually to warn him, and, with ominous shakings of her head, reiterated again and again, "William, beware of pride!" This he answered only by a look of the greatest meekness and sweetness. Father Elzear was with him when he died. He had received the holy viaticum and the last absolutions, the prayers for the dying had been said, and he lay calm and still, except for his laboured breathing, which grew fainter and fainter, until those around him fancied it had ceased, when suddenly he raised himself up, his face glowing, and his eyes kindling, and exclaimed, "Oh, that beautiful light, that beautiful light!" and then sank back and expired.

THE HAWKER.

One evening, an elderly man, with a sad weary-looking face, and the bent shoulders that tell of carrying a constant burden, came to me after the service, and asked to be taught some prayers. He said he was a hawker by trade, and had travelled up and down the country with his pack since he was quite a boy. For the last twenty years it had been his custom to go on

selling his goods until he had accumulated a considerable sum of money, and then to put up at some public-house and indulge in a carouse of two or three weeks' duration, until every penny was spent, when he would start again on his travels.

His parents, who died when he was quite young, were Irish and Catholic, and he had, of course, been baptized, and was nominally a Catholic himself; but he knew nothing of even the simplest elements of religion, and had never learnt any prayers, nor had any instruction whatever. Occasionally he attended mass on Sundays, because he saw that other Catholics did so, but he had not the faintest notion what it meant. He had been lodging for a short time at a public-house in Pontypool, kept by Catholics, and there he had heard some conversation about religion which had induced him to come and ask to be taught. He thought he should like to learn at least a few prayers, he said, as he was getting old, and did not feel very strong; but he seemed to regard the "few prayers" as a sort of talisman, which would preserve him from harm, and benefit him in some mysterious manner. His ignorance was complete; he had not the vaguest idea of how he came to exist, or of the existence of God; and his faculties, poor man! were stupefied; moreover, he had no memory, as a child has, to help him.

The first few evenings I was almost in despair—it

seemed so impossible to get any idea into his mind; but I made him kneel in the church before his lesson, and ask, as if he were asking for his life, that he might be able to understand. By degrees light dawned into his mind, his dormant faculties woke up, his dull eyes brightened, a look of interest shone upon his grey cold face, and in a few weeks' time he became earnest and interested. He prepared himself for the Sacrament of Penance with great apparent contrition, and when he had made his confession came every evening to be instructed for Holy Communion.

He received the wonderful tidings of our Lord's great love in giving Himself to be the food of our souls with unspeakable amazement, asking again and again, "Is it really true?" Not that he had any doubt in the ordinary meaning of the term; on the contrary, it was the simplicity of his faith that caused his wonder. He believed implicitly, but the greatness of the gift overwhelmed him.

He would sit stooping forward, his hands on his knees, his mouth open, and his eyes glistening. Now and then a tear would steal down his hard cheek, and when the lesson was over he would rouse himself with a deep sigh, and say slowly, shaking his head, "If I had but *a known*." The evening before his first communion he spoke of his past life and his wasted years with a sorrow that was quite touching.

He said he felt afraid to start again on his travels, but he knew no other way of getting his living, and he promised always to attend mass on Sundays, and on other days when he could, to go regularly to the Sacraments, and to abstain altogether from drink. In fact, he seemed to have taken to drinking simply from weariness of life, and to have had no idea that he was doing any wrong except to himself. The next day he came to say, "Good-bye," bringing five shillings as an offering for the altar where he had received his first communion, and he promised that he would come again in the course of the following year, if he lived, to let me know how he got on. He went away looking happy and at rest, but pale and feeble; and I never saw or heard of him again.

Probably he died somewhere on his journey. He had nothing to live for—neither home, nor wife, nor child, nor any relations that he knew of; and I could not but hope that, since he had been spared to find his way from the far country, and from feeding on the husks of the swine, to his Father's house, and the banquet of Divine love, his sad solitary life came to an end, and a brighter one began.

THE QUACK DOCTOR.

When the fathers first took charge of the church at Pontypool, the altar and sacristy were in a very destitute

condition. The vestments were old and shabby, scarcely fit to wear. There was a very scanty supply of altar linen, and but one dilapidated alb, and a surplice in like condition. The altar was devoid of ornament or furniture, save two common brass candlesticks, and a small mean tabernacle. The chalice was of the poorest kind, and so small that the fathers almost scrupled to use it; in fact, there was barely what was essential for decently offering the Holy Sacrifice, or for giving Benediction. By degrees many of these wants were supplied. Some compassionate nuns sent vestments and altar linen; some kind priests in richer missions sent the superfluities of their well-stocked sacristies; now and then a stranger, who visited the church in passing, took pity on the evident poverty, and supplied something that was lacking. But of all our benefactors none offered such precious gifts as an itinerant vendor of vegetable pills, who appeared in Pontypool some two years after the father's advent there. He and his wife made this town their head-quarters whilst they travelled about the neighbourhood, plying their trade of giving medical advice and selling pills. They were Catholics, and seemed much attracted by the frequent services in the church, and by the kindness of the fathers. At that time they were both rather addicted to drinking; at least, they used to break out now and then, or indulge after a hard day's walking, or on Saturday evenings

after standing in the market all day. But whilst staying at Pontypool they were induced to take the total abstinence pledge, and they became very devout, attending the church morning and evening every day as long as they remained. The following year the man came alone; his wife had a little boy, whom they had named "Francis," and he had left her in Liverpool with the child. He had kept steady, and was full of joy and thankfulness.

Two years later he came again in great distress; his wife was dead, and he had left his little Francis with some relations whilst he went on his rounds. He made a retreat whilst in the neighbourhood, and when he was leaving gave the fathers £1 for the altar, and other alms. From that time until his death, he came every year, bringing some beautiful gift or other for the altar. A handsome chalice, a monstrance set with jewels, a beautiful ciborium, silver cruets, thurible, incense boat, &c. &c., were given by him from time to time. He must have spent at least from £80 to £90 in the purchase of them. It was quite a puzzle how he could afford to be so generous, and the fathers at first hesitated to accept such costly gifts from one so poor, lest he should be depriving himself of food or clothing; but he assured them it was not so; he said he put aside every day the sum he should otherwise have spent in beer, or in something that he considered superfluous, and when,

as was often the case, some one offered to treat him, he asked to have the money instead of the beer, and added that also to his store: so that in the course of a few months he accumulated quite a large sum, and it made him exceedingly happy to be able to offer this little sacrifice in honour of the Blessed Sacrament. The last time he came his health seemed much broken; he was scarcely able to go on his accustomed rounds, and only cared to remain hours together in the church in prayer and meditation.

He said the only thing now wanting for the altar was a missal-stand, and he should bring a very handsome one next time he came. But the missal-stand is still wanting: the poor man died a few months afterwards in Manchester, and, when the fathers use the chalice and the other precious gifts he gave out of his poverty to our Lord, they say a prayer for the repose of the soul of this their humble benefactor.

THE WELSH COLLIER AND HIS IRISH WIFE.

Colliers have attracted a great deal of attention lately on account of their constant disputes with their masters, and the disastrous consequences they bring upon the neighbourhood by their frequent strikes. I know but little of this class of men, and possibly there may be steady industrious individuals amongst them;

but as a rule they are inveterate drunkards, and spend most of their time when above ground in the public-houses. I should hope, however, that my first experience of a collier and his habits was an exceptional case.

A woman came to me one day and begged me to visit her daughter, who, she said, had married a Welsh collier two years previously, very much against the wishes of her parents, and was now very ill. I went accordingly to the house to which she directed me, and found there a young and very pretty woman, apparently far gone in consumption; she was lying covered with a quilt on a settle or wooden bench by the fire without bed or mattress, so that she must have been in constant torture even had she not been suffering from illness. Moreover, every time she moved or turned she was in danger of being torn or hurt by the nails which were sticking out here and there from the wood. I asked her why she had no bed, and she told me her husband would not allow her to bring their bed downstairs, and she could not remain all day in her bedroom, it was so cold and lonesome; besides, she had to get up now and then to look after the fire and prepare his victuals, and it was as much as she could do to get across the room. All the time of my visit I noticed the fear and anxiety in her face as she looked and listened towards the door, but not until after I had seen her many times did she make any complaint of her husband.

I provided her with a mattress, and made her a little comfortable, and went several times a week to read to her and prepare her for confession. Then, by degrees, I learnt from her and from her neighbours how brutally she was treated. When her husband came home from work in the evening, instead of bringing any comfort to her after her long lonely day of suffering, he would scowl at her, and exclaim with an oath, "What! not dead yet?" This was his mildest mood. Sometimes he would amuse himself by knocking her off her couch on to the floor, and then dragging her about by her long hair until she became unconscious, when he would fling her again on her bed, and march off to the public-house. The neighbours, who did not venture to interfere with this pastime of his, went into the house after his departure, and did what they could for his victim. One evening, by way of variety, he threw her back on her couch and held a lighted candle in her mouth. It was no one's business, it seemed, to interfere. The doctor who attended the girl said the man ought to be summoned before the magistrates, but he contented himself with expressing this opinion. At that time I knew no one in the town except our poor people, and was powerless to remedy the evil. I ventured one day to remain until he came home to try if persuasion or remonstrance would make him a little more kind to his dying wife, but he heard me with a sneer, lighted his pipe, and walked off.

At last I induced the girl's parents, notwithstanding their fear of her husband, to carry her to their house, where at least she could die in peace. She was so far gone that she only lived three days after her removal, and happily her husband did not seek to disturb her; so that, as far as her weakness would allow, she could quietly prepare herself for death.

I heard afterwards that the collier married again two months after the death of his first wife; that soon afterwards he was attacked by a raging fever, during the course of which his shrieks and imprecations were so horrible that people trembled to pass the door; and that, after a fortnight's stormy suffering, he died in the very act of blaspheming Almighty God.

I do not like to end with so sad a story, so I will tell one more incident that occurred of a pleasanter nature. One Sunday afternoon, during the month of May, when the air was unusually close and oppressive, I was teaching the children at Cwmbran about our Blessed Lady, and trying to stir them up to have more devotion to her in her own month. They were all very heavy and stupid that day, and seemed as incapable of retaining an impression as if they had been a row of India-rubber balls. Amongst other things I told them to say, as often as they remembered it during the day, "Holy

Mary, be a mother to me," but they seemed so sleepy and listless I did not expect they would remember it at all. I had an idea when I dismissed them that, so far as they were concerned, the afternoon's work was wasted. A few weeks later, however, I was told that a little Protestant child, whose parents lived next door to one of our Catholic families, had died after a very short illness. The night of her death she was heard saying to her mother, "Mother, if I say, 'Holy Mary, be a mother to me,' shall I go where *Nellie* is?" (*Nellie* was a Catholic child who had died a short time previously.) Her mother understood nothing about it, but said "Yes," to soothe the child; and all night long the little one repeated again and again, "Holy Mary, be a mother to me." It was the only prayer she knew, and she had learnt it the very afternoon I deemed my lesson wasted, having quite accidentally accompanied one of our Catholic children to the chapel.

One little seed had taken root. We may hope that Mary took the little way-side flower, and planted it in her garden in heaven.

APPENDIX:

Sermons

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF
THE ABERSYCHAN, CWMBRAN, BLAENAVON,
AND RISCA SCHOOL-CHAPELS.

I.

SERMON *by the late* FATHER PROCTOR, *Prior of the Dominican Monastery, Woodchester, on the occasion of the opening of the Abersychan School-chapel, September 17th, 1863.*

“Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

THESE words were addressed by our Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples, and to the multitudes, on a certain mountain in Judea, for which reason it is called His Sermon on the Mount, in which He lays down the fundamental principles and maxims of a Christian's life. By them we are to understand that there are in this world two ways in which mankind may walk, and that, in the exercise of their own free will, they are at liberty to choose which of the two they please; but one or the other they must choose, because there are but two. But how are we to understand these words? Must we understand that there are two roads made on earth whereon we should walk with our bodily feet, or are

these words to be understood in a spiritual sense ? for there is a great deal in the right understanding of the words of Scripture. Scripture, rightly understood, is the word of salvation : misunderstood, it is the word of perdition. The Scripture is to be understood in various senses—sometimes in a literal sense, sometimes in a metaphorical sense, and sometimes in a mystical sense ; and unless a person is well acquainted with the different senses in which the words are to be interpreted it is impossible to understand them. Let a man be ever so clever, ever so learned, it will be impossible for him rightly to understand the word of God, as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, unless he have some infallible guide to teach him ! Now, who is to teach us the right meaning of the word of God as recorded in the Scriptures ? I answer, the Church of God—that Church which is established here on earth to teach mankind those things which He has revealed, and which Church He has made the depository of His sacred word, for it belongs to the Church of God to judge of the true sense of the Holy Scriptures. How, then, are we to understand the words of the text ? I answer, that these words are to be understood in a metaphorical sense, and in a spiritual sense : they mean that there are two ways of living in this world—one right, and the other wrong ; that whosoever takes the wrong way will arrive at destruction, and whosoever takes the right way will arrive at eternal life. And what are we to understand by destruction—by that destruction to which the broad gate and the wide way lead ? I answer, that by destruction we understand that of which St. Paul speaks in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, when he says, that “The Lord shall be revealed with the angels of His power in a flame of fire, rendering vengeance to them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel,” who, he (St. Paul) says, “shall suffer destruction from the face of the Lord, and the glory of His power.” And by “the life” we are to understand that true life, that real life, that

glorious life, that eternal life which is our destination, provided we, during this our mortal life, correspond with God's designs in our regard; and compared with which life, the life we now hold, is but a shadow—may be called rather a lingering death than a true life. From the beginning of the world mankind have chosen to enter by the wide gate rather than the narrow and strait way. Adam and Eve—our first parents—chose the wide gate; and their posterity, at one time, by walking in this broad road, drew on themselves the destruction incident upon the Deluge; for you know at one time all mankind had corrupted their ways—had become so wicked that God repented He had made man on earth, and determined to destroy them all by a general deluge, which he did, only Noah, who was a good man, and his family, being saved in the Ark. Now, at the time that our blessed Saviour was born into this world, all the nations of the earth, by choosing the broad way and the wide gate, fell into a state of the grossest ignorance, idolatry, and vice; all the nations throughout the world were gone astray, for they knew not God. They did not know from whence they came, or whither they were going, or why they were placed in this world. Since the establishment of the Christian religion a great improvement has taken place, insomuch that (although when Christ came to establish His kingdom here there were none that knew God—no, not one; for, as Scripture says, “God looked down from heaven to see if there were any to do good; they were all gone astray—none to do good, not one”) now there are a great number who know and worship Him in spirit and in truth. There are no less than two hundred millions of Christians now existing in the world, serving God in true religion, and keeping His commandments. There are two hundred millions of Roman Catholics, professing the same religion as those assembled! Thanks to God for this great improvement! But, nevertheless, the generality are still walking in the broad road—that is to say, lead-

ing lives unworthy of the God that made them, unworthy of rational creatures; for why did God make man? whence came we? what are we doing in this world? what have we to do? and where are we going? There are millions and millions in the world that know nothing of this. There are even now seven hundred millions of human beings, like those assembled, made after the image and likeness of God, capable of knowing Him, loving Him, serving Him, and enjoying Him throughout an endless eternity, who know Him not,—know not what they are to do, or what their destination is. They are still involved in the darkness of idolatry, of abominable vice; and, even among Christians, how many are there in this very country who are living in the world as if they had not got a God to serve, or a soul to save—living in a total forgetfulness of their Creator—of Him who made them—and of the duty which they have to perform here below? God has made man in His own image and likeness; bestowed on him this noble body, endowed as it is with so many excellent organs and senses, an immortal soul, endowed with those most excellent qualities—will, memory, and understanding; he (man) being capable of inheriting an eternal kingdom. It is a far greater blessing to be created capable of a kingdom in heaven than to be born heirs of parents who are governors of a great kingdom or empire. Now, why has God made us? why has he placed us in this world? and what is our position? God has made us for Himself and not for ourselves. He has sent us into this world for no other end but to know Him, to love Him, and to serve Him by keeping His commandments; and He tells us that, if we do this, then, after death, He will take us to Himself, and make us partakers of His eternal kingdom. No sooner are we born than a commandment is imposed on us, which we must keep and fulfil. The moment a child enters the world, that moment a commandment is issued from God—the greatest of all the

commandments : God, by His word, says to that child, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." What does this mean? It means that we are to seek God, to use our best endeavours to come to a knowledge of Him and His attributes, that we are to give Him the affections of our hearts and our desires, and on all occasions give Him the preference before any other consideration. He tells us that we must love Him with our whole soul—that is to say, with all the power of our soul—with will, memory, and understanding. We must love God with will, by seeking knowledge, and doing His will, in order that our will may become conformable to His : love Him by our understanding, by obedience to Christ, submitting our understanding to the Divine revelation, and believing what God teaches us : love God with memory, by calling to mind His commandments, and His benefits, and our duties in this regard : love God with our minds by directing our thoughts to Him, and according to the rule which He has prescribed. A man is not allowed to think what he pleases. He must regulate his thoughts according to God's commandments, and love God with his whole strength—that is to say, with the body as well as the soul, and with all the organs and senses of the body. Who has given us these eyes—these excellent instruments whereby we are enabled to see—the greatest blessing we can possess? It is God, the purpose being to enable us to see and revere His works.

[Having proceeded further in this strain, the Rev. Father Proctor said—] A good conscience is a continual feast. Now, it is with a view of teaching the poor people of this neighbourhood, who are now unfortunately running wild, who know little or nothing about God, or about their souls, or about heaven or hell, or eternity, that the good fathers have come to establish themselves at Pontypool and in this village, where they

have established the school that has been opened to-day, and in which the word of God will be explained to them in all its purity and integrity, and in which they will be taught how to walk in the narrow and strait way that leadeth to life.

[After some further observations, the Rev. Father Procter concluded a discourse which was listened to throughout with marked attention.]

II.

SERMON *preached by the Very Rev. B. B. VAUGHAN,
Prior of the Benedictine Monastery, Belmont, on the
occasion of the opening of the School-chapel at Cwmbran,
January 1st, 1867.*

“The Word was made flesh.”

WE cannot do better on such a day as this than meditate on the wonderful event spoken of in these words. The whole world was at rest after centuries of war, revolution, and turmoil. The noise of the crash of falling kingdoms, and the loud march of conquest had died away. The songs of triumph and the shout of the victor were hushed, and peace reigned supreme over the whole earth. It was then, when the Empire of Rome was acknowledged over the whole known world; when the throne of the Cæsars seemed most firmly established; when power, passion, and intellect developed themselves in their manifold ways; when men, wearied with the arts of war, turned to cultivate the

arts of peace; when the philosophy, and science, and the beautiful dreams of the bright land of Greece found a home and a development in the land of Italy, and the world had reached its height of pomp and power—it was then, in the far-off land of Judea, in the little city of Bethlehem, there was a babe lying in a manger, cradled on the straw, with a poor mother and a poor foster-father, and the beasts of the field for companions; and this poor weak babe, trembling into life, was to overthrow that mighty empire; that humble cradle was to touch the lofty throne, and it would totter and collapse, the crown would fall from the head of Cæsar, and the sceptre be broken in his hand.

And now, my brethren, how were these things accomplished? What principles were brought into action to produce so wonderful a result. In these days, when men are seeking everywhere for new principles and theories, and new ways of attaining power, it were well to consider what principles were brought into action to overturn the mighty empire of the world, and to found the one power which triumphed over all other powers—the one kingdom which has outlasted all other kingdoms—the one Church of God, which no power has been able to overcome, and against which no kingdom could ever prevail.

Men rise up from time to time, offering the world new principles, exciting men's passion and reason into revolution against the kingdom of the Church—nay, even against God himself; but one after another they vanish away, and the Church remains the same. For a time there is clamour, and triumph, and seeming success; but a few years pass and a new theory has arisen, with equal promise and as dazzling a show, to die away and be forgotten in its turn. But the Church always remains the same, and, when the clouds which men have raised to blind themselves have passed away, they see her in the same place, with the same work, the same mission, and the same power.

What, then, were the means employed by God to overthrow the ancient dynasties, and to establish this enduring empire?

They were, first, the *words* of Christ; secondly, His *works*. "This man spake as never man spake," even His enemies were compelled to say. His words were few, plain, and simple, but of such wondrous power over the hearts of men that at the sound of them men rose up and left their work and labour, their wealth and their homes, and followed Him even unto death. One single short reply from His lips confounded all the wisdom of the Scribes and Pharisees, and made Pilate tremble on his judgment-seat. And in these days, my brethren, there are men risen up who deny the Divinity of Christ, who will not confess Him to be God. They speak of Him as a model *man*, as the most perfect specimen of human nature, as the reality of the pattern drawn and described by ancient philosophers, as fulfilling an ideal deemed too perfect until He appeared. This they acknowledge Him to be; this conclusion they are compelled to draw from the description of His words and actions; so natural, so full of the impress of truth is the narrative given in the gospel of His history.

But, my dear brethren, they thus acknowledge too much for their own cause. If Christ be all this that they describe, they are at once confounded by His own words; for He spoke of Himself as God, as having a kingdom, though an invisible one: "My kingdom is not of this world." When questioned by the Jews, He acknowledged Himself the Son of God; and so far was this from being a figurative way of speaking, and so literally did His hearers understand what He meant, that they said He spoke blasphemy, and took up stones to cast at Him.

When St. Peter answered Him in the name of all the Apostles, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God," He accepted the confession of faith, and said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but My

Father who is in heaven," and proceeded to call St. Peter the rock on which He would build His Church, and to commit to Him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. When standing before the tribunal of Pilate He was asked the question, "Art Thou the Son of God?" He answered, "I am."

Now, if Christ were the perfect model of humanity, the ideal man described by these new philosophers, would He have laid claim to a position and dignity—nay, even to a Divinity—which he did not possess? In that case, instead of being the hero they describe, He was a base pitiful impostor, the meanest and lowest of mankind. Could a man, whose life was so perfect as to throw into the shade all the ancient descriptions of perfection, descend so low as to pretend to be what he was not? No: as even those who would fain do so cannot deny that He was perfect man, they cannot in reason deny that He is also perfect God. The structure they have taken so much pains to build up is shattered by that single word, "I am."

And now, in proceeding to speak of the works of Christ, we must see what instruments men generally make use of to attain power, and to accomplish their ends. These are, first, brute force; secondly, passion; thirdly, intellect. Thus, the Romans used force; they conquered by the power of the sword, trampling down the nations in their way, and dragging the kings of the nations at their chariot-wheels. The Mahomedans acted in the world through passion, promising men as their highest reward the full gratification of their senses. The Greeks ruled men by the power of intellect, fascinating their minds by the subtle reasonings of philosophy and beautiful imaginations.

But the Founder of the Church did not use any of these powers when He established His kingdom—not that of brute force, for He said, "Put up thy sword into the scabbard;" not that of passion, for He taught the duty of self-abnegation; not of intellect, for He preached

the folly of the Cross, and said, "If any man will be wise, let him become a fool." And what was His life? He was born, as we have seen, in a stable; in his earliest infancy He had to flee away for His life into a distant country. When He returned He dwelt in the meanest of cities, whose very name was a reproach. For thirty years He lived in subjection, working with His foster-father at the trade of a carpenter; and when, at last, he began His Ministry, and went forth to teach and to preach, He was still the poorest of the poor, and even His own relations mocked at Him. He undertook long and wearying journeys in the fulfilment of His mission, preaching and teaching by day, praying and watching by night, meeting with many reproaches, and gaining but few disciples. He chose for His Apostles men poor like Himself, and unlearned and ignorant; and in the end there was the fearful ignominy, the unutterable anguish of His Passion, and the death of a common malefactor hung upon a cross in the sight of all men, naked and between two thieves.

Such was the Prince and Founder of this kingdom. Let us see how His delegated successors carried on His work. Imagine St. Peter on the way to Rome. There sat the gorgeous city, in its pomp and power; the Temple of Jupiter and the Pantheon, raising themselves proudly on high; Cæsar, the emperor of the world, worshipped as God. On the dusty high way, with his face towards the city, there walks a poor man, with worn garments, sandalled feet, rough hard hands, and weather-beaten face. He meets a proud Roman citizen, who questions him about his journey—"Where are you going?" and Peter replies, "To Rome." "And why?"—"To overthrow the empire, to shatter the gods of Rome, and preach the worship of another God mightier than they and greater than Cæsar." "But, if you come to conquer, where are your armies?"—"I have none." "You are, then, perhaps, a philosopher, bringing us some new and wonderful discovery whereby these things that you

“speak of will be accomplished?”—“No; I am poor and ignorant. You see that man fishing in the Tiber? Like him, I have toiled for my daily bread.” “But who, then, is this God whom you are going to preach?”—“He is a man who was crucified between two thieves.” “And suppose you do not succeed?”—“Then I will die.”

How contemptuously would the proud Roman regard this poor man and his mission! St. Peter nevertheless went on to Rome. He preached and taught the principles of his Master. To the power of the world he opposed the weakness in which the strength of God is made perfect; to passions, the doctrine of sacrifice and self-abnegation; to intellect, the folly of the Cross; and these new principles spread abroad in the hearts of men, who taught them in their turn by word and example, and when they could do no more they died, for the days of persecution came, and the seed sown in the blood of martyrs brought forth a great harvest of souls. In vain the whole power of the world bore down upon the growing kingdom; one emperor even ceased persecuting because, as he said, the more Christians he killed the more sprang up in their places. And years went on, and the hordes of barbarians from the North swept down like an avalanche upon Rome; the proud empire tottered and fell; but the same Church which had permeated the nation, and won the hearts of the polished Romans, worked like a spell on the rude barbarians who usurped their place, doing what all the boasted civilisation of Rome was powerless to accomplish—softening and influencing the great destroyer, until the conquerors of Rome knelt humbly at the foot of the Cross, and finally became the instruments for spreading Christianity over the earth.

And on through the course of history we see one nation succeed another, one empire and kingdom follow another, like a series of dissolving views; but, mingling with all, or triumphing over all, or winning all, the

Church of God remains the same. Either the kingdoms of the world submit to its guidance, and follow its principles, or, if they rise up against it, sooner or later they totter and fall. And, as with kingdoms, so with individuals: either they must submit to be guided by these principles of Christ, or all their natural gifts and endowments, all their power, passions, and intellect, are vain. It is a natural instinct in the heart of man to desire perfection. There is but one way to attain it, and it is to follow Him who is most perfect, to make His principles the rule of our lives. We may have to follow Him along the rugged way of the Cross; we may have to go with Him even to Calvary; but beyond Calvary is Thabor—not the Thabor we see, but that which we long for; not the Thabor of a transitory transfiguration, but the Thabor that endures; not a passing vision of His Face, shining like the sun, and His garments whiter than snow, but the never-ending glory of the Beatific Vision, and the rest of the Saints that passeth not away.

III.

SERMON *preached by the Rev. Dr. MARSHALL on the occasion of the opening of the Catholic School-chapel at Blaenavon, May 18th, 1868.*

IT is recorded, with touching simplicity, in the holy Gospels, that, on the night before His Passion, our Blessed Lord sent two of His disciples into the city of Jerusalem, telling them that they should meet there a man bearing a pitcher of water, to whom they were to say that their Master had need of a guest-chamber wherein to eat the Paschal Supper with His disciples;

and that immediately on being made aware of this need he would at once willingly supply it, showing them a large upper room furnished, where they were to prepare the feast. It was not, therefore, by an accident that the Last Supper was eaten in that upper chamber. No doubt there were many other rooms that might have been hired for the purpose in the city, but our Lord had fixed His choice on this particular chamber, and had so disposed the heart of its owner as to make him ready to give it up willingly at His request; and it was, as you know, in this upper chamber—in this room of His own choice—that, when eating His last supper with His chosen guests, He bequeathed to them this great Sacrament of His love, the holy Eucharist; changing bread into the substance of His Body, and wine into the substance of His Blood, and bidding His Apostles and their successors do the same in all ages in remembrance of Him; for He knew well that Himself only could be His own fitting memorial—the one memorial worthy of Him.

From the time of our Lord's Ascension—so early, indeed, as the day of Pentecost—we find that the disciples were accustomed to assemble themselves together for the celebration of the Divine mysteries, and for prayer in places set apart specially for that purpose, even though there was yet no positive command to do so. Wherever Christian communities were formed, there were also to be found the men with the pitchers of water, who were ready to give up the room on which Jesus had fixed His choice for a chamber wherein to receive and entertain His guests. And, even when the dark days of persecution fell upon the Church, and the mountain-tops of prayer were exchanged for the bloody sea of martyrdom—even then the very dead gave up their sepulchres when they heard the request of Jesus for a chamber wherein to receive and entertain His guests, and the catacombs of Rome became the guest-chambers of the King of kings, dearer and more precious.

to us on that account than for aught else in them that may attract the interest of the theologian or the antiquarian. But the days of persecution passed away, and there came a time when imperial Rome herself bowed before the all-conquering power of Jesus, shook off the tyranny of her heathen emperors, and submitted to the gentle yoke of the Cross—a time when, by the will and with the authority of God Himself, the Vicar of Jesus Christ ruled on the throne of the Cæsars; and then great indeed was the number of men with pitchers of water who offered guest-chambers to the Lord of heaven and earth, and, because the churches could not be built fast enough, they took possession of the old heathen basilicas, the old halls of justice, and turned them into true basilicas—true temples of the Most High God—true halls of justice, wherein, when the culprit knelt before his judge, instead of a sentence of death he came to receive pardon and peace. And thus at last over the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, the first Bishop of Rome, there rose up that magnificent Church of St. Peter which is the marvel and the glory of all Christendom. Another followed where St. Paul, his great fellow-labourer, the noble and royal-hearted Apostle of the Gentiles, welcomed the sword which was to be the instrument of his self-sacrifice for that Lord whose love had urged Him to give up wealth, and rank, and worldly honour, and earthly affection for His sake; another where our Blessed Lady, by a miraculous fall of snow, had herself marked out the site; another where St. Laurence glorified God by his exulting mockery of his persecutors, on the fiery bed where he was roasted to death; another where St. Sebastian was pierced through with arrows; and another and another whereon any martyr's blood was shed, or any great deed was accomplished, for the glory of God.

There is a beautiful tradition most appropriate to this season—so beautiful, and so like our Lord, that I care not to inquire on what authority it rests—to the

effect that, during the forty days which intervened between His Resurrection and His Ascension, He visited every part of the world, marking out every spot on which a church should be built in after ages, and consecrating by His own blessing every place in which His sacramental presence should afterwards dwell. We know that the Popes were always singularly careful in fixing the sites of churches; and we know, too, from many an old tradition, that often, when, through some mistaken choice of a site supposed to be rendered sacred by a holy deed, a church was begun to be built, the very brute beasts were commissioned to interfere and to carry away the materials to the spot fixed upon by Jesus as a guest-chamber. So has it been with all the old cathedrals in this country: they are His chosen dwelling-places, and, therefore, deeply as it must grieve us to see them desecrated and polluted by blasphemy, we may have a firm confidence that a day will come when the men with the pitchers of water will rise up and render back to God the things that are God's. So it is also with this church, small and humble though it is; He has chosen it. Do not call it a *place of worship*, as a theatre is a place of amusement, or a bank is a place of business: it is not even merely a house of prayer: it is a guest-chamber of Jesus, where He invites you who are His friends to feed you with His own Body and Blood: it is His chosen dwelling-place, where He would have you all come to Him, to lay down at His feet your cares, your sorrows, your trials, your sins. Here you will bring your children to be regenerated in the life-giving waters of baptism, and here you will bring your own sin-laden consciences; and, though your hearts may be black as the forges in which many of you spend your lives, they shall be washed as white as wool in the blood of the Lamb who taketh away the sins of the world. The very title given to this church invites you; it is dedicated to the Sacred Heart of our Divine and loving Lord; and also to a Saint who loved

that Sacred Heart—St. Felix of Cantalice, the happy Saint who is now resting from his toil near his Lord's Sacred Heart in heaven—a son of the seraphic St. Francis, whose brethren are your appointed pastors here to guide you in the way of salvation.

IV.

SERMON *preached by the Rev. Dr. MARSHALL on the occasion of the opening of the School-chapel at Risca, August 12th, 1868.*

WHEN we consider the life on earth of our great pattern, Jesus Christ, there is one thing that strikes us almost more than the great love with which He suffered for us ; and that is, the patience with which He bore His sufferings.

Insults and injuries were heaped upon Him, yet seldom did a complaint or remonstrance escape His lips : “As a lamb before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.”

He pleads with us only by His silence, by His sighs, and by His tears. Yet sometimes the great love of His Sacred Heart found vent in words—sometimes His tenderness seemed unable any longer to bear the ingratitude of men, and He pierces our hearts with a cry of sorrow, as when He uttered those touching words, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head.” He, the King of kings, the Creator and Lord of all things, came to His own earth, and found no resting-place among the children of men. He could have sent a legion of angels to build for Him a temple with a dome more beautiful than the azure vault of heaven, and spangled with gems and jewels more brilliant than the

glittering stars ; He could have taken possession of the proud basilicas, and cradled Himself in the palaces of kings ; but no ! He came on earth for love of men, and He desired that they should find for Him a home, and give Him a place of rest. But they received Him not. He who shelters the beasts of the field, and sees that the birds have their nests, found no place to lay His Head. There was no rest for Him. On that winter night, so cold that even in the sunny land of Palestine the cattle were housed and cared for, "There was no room for Him in the inn." Proud and lordly men who went up to Bethlehem with chariots and horses to enroll themselves of the royal house of David, and assert themselves of the lineage of a king, filled all the inns with themselves and their retainers. The poor foot-sore and weary travellers must wander away outside the city walls to find a shelter with the ox and the ass in a half-ruined shed ; and there He, perfect God of perfect God, and perfect Man of an immaculate Mother, came into the world houseless and homeless, with only a little straw on which to lay His Head.

And even in the manger and the crib He might not rest. He waited but to receive the homage of the shepherds, and the gifts of the kings from the East ; and then, when it might be thought that, with the gold poured out at His feet, he might provide himself a home, there came the voice in the stillness of the night, "Arise, take the young Child and His Mother, and flee into the land of Egypt." He must be carried away into a strange land, amid strange tribes, speaking a strange tongue, where none would bid Him welcome or find Him a home.

And, when at last He returned to His own land, He who feeds all creatures had to labour for His daily bread ; with saw, and hammer, and chisel, and plane, He had to toil in the sweat of His blessed Brow to earn the food which all men look for from His Hand.

And then, after thirty years of silence and labour, when He who had left His Father in heaven bade

farewell to His Mother upon earth—when He left the holy house at Nazareth, and went forth on His appointed ministry—there was no rest for Him. Whilst men slept He prayed. When all the world was wrapped in slumber He walked upon the waters. Or, did He for a moment lay down His wearied body to sleep, amid the fishing-tackle and cordage of Peter's boat, scarcely were His eyes closed when He was aroused by the cry, "Lord, save us! we perish;" and He must arise to still the tempest, and calm the waters.

The winds and the waters obey His word, and are at peace. But who shall give Him rest? Not even at the end was it given Him. At the Last Supper, when His love for us overflowed all bounds, and He gave us the precious legacy of His Body and His Blood, John reposed upon His bosom, but Jesus found only the breast of Judas whereon to lay His Head. And when He bore our punishment and did penance for our sins, and His blessed brow was bathed in the blood of His agony, the Apostles slept peacefully in the garden's shade, but He had only the knotted roots of the olive-trees on which to lay His Head. Not even on the cross could His Head find rest; the rocks were riven, the sun refused its light, even the tombs could not hold back their dead, because His hour was come; but He could not lay down His Head even to die, because of the thorns that pierced His temples and tortured His brow. No rest for Him save that of death, on the cold hard rock of Joseph's tomb!

And, after His Resurrection, so great was His yearning to find rest amongst us that He still lingered below. The work of redemption was accomplished; "It is finished," He had said; He had spoken the last words to His Apostles, and appointed Peter in His place; heaven was waiting for Him in breathless expectation; the angels wonder at His delay, and yet He comes not; still He lingers, looking for a place of rest, thinking at last we shall give Him some place whereon to lay His

Head. And when He leaves us it is only because it is better for us that He should go away, for if He goes not away the Paraclete will not come.

But now, my brethren, the times are changed; the exile and the wanderer has found a home. He who dwells in the highest heaven has also His abode on earth; and not one only—thousands and thousands of altars over the whole world are the place of His repose.

Now is the time of triumph and of victory, for over the length and breadth of the earth, in east and west, and north and south, are temples raised for Him.

From the lofty basilica, with its marble and its gold, to the small and humble chapel in which we meet to-day, everywhere are there shrines for Jesus. The rich give of their abundance, the poor of their poverty; they who have nothing, of the labour of their hands—that He may have a home to lay His head—that there He may abide and give blessings to His people.

Here, too, He has come; on this altar he now rests. But do not think that is all that He requires; it was not the material dwellingplaces that He was yearning for when He exclaimed, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have their nests, but I have nowhere to lay My Head." It is of our hearts that He complains; it is there that He seeks to enter and find rest. Do not refuse Him an entrance. Light up the lamps of faith and love, and bid Him welcome to the guest chamber. Drive away the foxes, scare away the birds, sweep and garnish the room, and He will take possession of it. Receive Him as His saints received Him, especially those who are to be your patrons—St. Anthony and St. Clare, to whom this chapel is dedicated.

Break down the rocks of pride, remove the mountains of vanity and self-love, prepare the way of the Lord, and He will enter in and dwell with you, and abide for evermore.

THE END.

